

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

MAY, 1926

Vol. LXXXVII

NUMBER 4

Derrington

A STORY OF NEW YORK LIFE, THE LONGEST AND MOST
IMPORTANT WORK OF ITS AUTHOR, EMBODYING
MANY REFLECTIONS OF HIS OWN BUSINESS AND
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES—THE MOTTO THAT
HE AFFIXED TO IT WAS THE QUESTION,
“WHEN SHOULD A GIRL MARRY?”

By Frank A. Munsey

Author of “On the Field of Honor,” “A Tragedy of Errors,” etc.

A NOVEL IN TWO PARTS—PART ONE

“YOU know that I love you, Phil, that I have loved you as you have loved me, ever since we were children, but mamma is not willing that I should become engaged for at least a year.”

This was Marion Kingsley's answer to Phil Derrington's proposal. The color left his face.

“Does your mother object to me, Marion?” he asked the girl, unable to conceal his disappointment.

“No, indeed, she thinks the world of you, Phil—you should know that.”

“I have always thought so, but now—”

Phil hesitated, and Marion did not wait for him to finish his sentence.

“You must still think so,” she said. “It would break mamma's heart to know you doubted her loyalty to you.”

“Why does she want us to wait, then? Aren't we old enough to marry?”

“Mamma thinks not, and besides, she wants me to see something of society as a girl.”

“And you?”

She looked up at him, and love and tenderness were in her eyes.

“Can't you see—don't you know that nothing in all the world would make me so happy as to be your wife? This love is not new to you and me, Phil. We have been lovers all our lives, and I have always

looked forward to the end of my school days, thinking that you and I would then be more to each other than ever."

"And now they have ended we are less to each other," returned Phil.

"No, we are not—don't say that, Phil; it is hard enough for me to yield to mamma without your making it harder."

"I don't want to make it harder for you, little girl. I know you love me, but I am so disappointed!"

"I'm very sorry for you, Phil, dear—very sorry for myself, but what can I do? You would not have me marry against mamma's wishes, I am sure."

"I would not wish you to, and yet it might be best." There was a touch of desperation in his voice.

"Phil!"

"I know, but we can't look into the future; we can't tell what changes a year will make in us. To-day we love each other and are suited to each other. Up to this time you have been free from the flattery of society, and I have cared only for you. How will it be at the end of a year?"

"I should be very sorry to think that in so short a time your love for me would be gone," said Marion, the tears starting to her eyes.

"I didn't mean that," answered Phil tenderly. "I can't imagine that I could ever cease to love you; and yet I have seen enough of life already to be convinced that the more a man mingles with people, the more lovable girls he knows, the less is his devotion to any one of them. The same thing is equally true with women, and what is true of others may be true of you and me, Marion. It is impossible for us to realize it as applied to ourselves, I know."

"But it is different with you and me, Phil. We shall never cease to love each other; and then it is only a year—think of that, dear, and help me to wait patiently. You will, won't you?"

There was a sweet, gentle pleading in her tones that Phil could not resist.

"I will do anything to make you happy," he replied; "but this delay is so unnecessary, so unreasonable. Your mother was married at sixteen, and you are nineteen now."

"That is just it. Mamma feels that she had no girlhood herself, and she's determined that I shall not marry without having some of the pleasures that other girls have."

"But what does all that amount to? Hasn't her life been a happy one?"

"Yes, exceptionally happy; but she cannot get over the feeling that she missed something that never can be made up."

"There is such a thing as a girl's getting it all in a very short time," replied Phil sentimentally, "and then she has no enthusiasm, no sweetness left in her soul."

"Why, Phil, I never heard you talk so extravagantly before!"

"I never had occasion to draw such a picture before, but it's not a bad likeness of the blasé girl whose youth and freshness have been dulled by her insane desire to see it all—to miss nothing."

II

PHIL DERRINGFORTH was two years old when Marion Kingsley was born. She was as sweet a baby as one could wish to see, with bright blue eyes and dimpled cheeks. Phil was a promising boy with good features and a strong body.

The Derringforths and the Kingsleys were neighbors; they were also close friends. As Phil and Marion grew older they were as brother and sister. The quarrels between them were singularly few. She seemed to realize that his greater age entitled him to superior knowledge. Phil was of the same mind, though for one of his boyish tendencies he was exceptionally polite to his sweet little companion.

There is much in the inheritance of a fine fiber—a natural courtesy, a thoughtfulness for others. These characteristics were Phil's, and they had been supplemented by careful training. Marion, too, was equally well born, equally well bred. They were devoted to each other; unhappy without each other. It had been love from infancy. There is nothing sweeter than such love, starting almost with life itself and developing with the growth of the children, changing its character as they change, but ever strengthening and broadening until it ripens into the deepest sentiment.

Marion learned to like the sports that Phil liked. She cared nothing for dolls. A game of ball with Phil or a dash on her pony suited her best. "Our boys," they were called by their parents, and Marion liked the term. Phil was her ideal. There was no other boy in all the world like him, and to be classed with him as a boy was joy enough for her.

She learned to row, to run races, to

jump, and to climb trees. The chase after a woodchuck or the snaring of a partridge gave her no less pleasure than Phil. Many was the tramp they took together across country, gathering wild flowers, hunting squirrels, and robbing the nests of bees for the tiny cells of honey. Often they would get stung, but Marion would bear the pain as bravely as Phil, and they would laugh away the tears that sometimes forced themselves into their eyes.

In the winter, when Phil and Marion were in their New York homes, they studied together and played together. They read the same books. Phil liked tales of adventure; so did Marion. The ordinary "girl's story" did not possess enough action to satisfy her healthy nature.

At twelve Phil was sent away to a military school where the discipline was strict and exacting. He did not take kindly to the machine life at first, but in due time, like most boys, he became very fond of it. The separation from Marion troubled him most, but he wrote her many letters and received many in return. Their love grew during his absence.

The fall and winter went by; the summer came, and Phil and Marion were together again in the country. He taught her to drill, and the old sports of previous summers, with their ponies and boats and tennis, made the weeks fly by all too quickly.

The vacation was over at last, and Phil and Marion were again at their respective schools. The attachment between them was stronger now than a year before, and each season it became deeper and broader and more mature.

Phil had taken excellent rank in school, and had risen to be captain of a company. At eighteen he graduated. Marion was present to witness the exercises. Phil acquitted himself well. Marion was proud of him. He was the tallest and handsomest and cleverest fellow in his class, she told herself. Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley shared her pride. They were scarcely less delighted with Phil's achievements than his own father and mother. He was like a son to them, as Marion was like a daughter to the Derringforths. Each family expected, as a matter of course, that some day Phil would marry Marion.

When the summer vacation was over, Phil went into his father's office to begin the career of a business man. Marion spent

three years more in school, and then graduated well up in her class. She had developed a talent for music. Her voice was sweet and well trained, and she played the violin with a good deal of skill. She was tall and willowy. Her eyes were intelligent and pleasing. The lines of her face were good, and her coloring was exquisite. It was this that added most to her beauty.

With her development into womanhood, developed also the ambition of her mother. The Kingsleys had abundant means, and their position in society was high. There was nothing they could not do for Marion; nothing they did not do that promised to be for her interest. The six months that followed her graduation were spent in Europe with her father and mother. On her return she had a brilliant coming out, and was launched successfully upon the social swirl. She was very much admired, very much flattered.

All this confirmed Mrs. Kingsley in her decision that Marion should have a year and more of girl life before marrying.

"You are quite as pretty as any of them," her mother told her, "and are far more accomplished. Your singing and playing will give you the greatest advantage. You will make friends and social connections that will be invaluable to you. You cannot understand this as I do, my child—you can never know what I missed by marrying so young."

It was only a few weeks after Marion's début that Phil formally proposed to her.

For months before Mrs. Kingsley had been at great pains to prepare her daughter for this. It had been done by clever tact, by delicate suggestions, by examples of social success. These efforts were not without effect upon Marion. Her ambition had been kindled. She began to take an interest in society matters and in society people. The names and triumphs of reigning belles were now familiar to her.

"Both your father and myself are very fond of Phil, as you know," said the ambitious mother. "We hope to see him marry you some day, but not now. I cannot allow my daughter to lose the best part of her life, as I did; and besides, I do not believe in early marriages for girls. Twenty-five is quite young enough."

"Twenty-five!" repeated Marion. "You wouldn't expect me to wait six years for Phil?"

Mrs. Kingsley was thoroughly sincere.

Few mothers ever loved their daughters more than she loved Marion. It was this love that prompted her to urge a late marriage, believing, as many do, that it is the true secret of happiness.

Nothing of this sort had been said to Marion until her school days were over. Mrs. Kingsley had a high appreciation of the value of culture, and had devoted herself to her daughter's interests in this respect. She had read with her, studied with her, and brought such influences around her as would tend to make her more thoughtful, more studious. The best instructors in music and other branches had been freely employed.

Marion showed the effect of this careful training. She knew nothing of the lighter novels. Her reading had been confined to standard authors. Her knowledge of history, biography, and the best fiction was far greater than that of most girls. Her association with Phil, too, had been helpful to her. He was a thoughtful fellow, and she had learned to look at things as he looked at them. Her mental grasp was that of the masculine mind, while in her personality and manner she was as delicate and refined as any of her sex.

When Phil proposed to her, she was both very glad and very sorry. It was just what she expected him to do, just what he should have done. She felt deeply gratified; she felt a just sense of pride in receiving an offer of marriage from so fine a fellow. She loved him more than ever.

Phil had been in his father's office three years, and already had an interest in the firm. His income was sufficient to warrant him in proposing marriage. He knew that the girl he loved was worthy of him—the one of all others to make him happy. To have waited longer before asking Marion to be his wife would have been folly. Her heart responded yes, a thousand times yes, to his proposal, but her mother's wishes—she could not go contrary to them, though the disappointment to her was death.

"I understand and appreciate your ambition for me, mamma," she said, "but I am sure all the society in the world could not give me the happiness I have with Phil. What is there in society, after all," she went on, "that people should give up their lives to it? Does it make one happier? Does it make one better and truer? The little I have seen of it shows me that it is insincere. The flattery and jealousies and

strife—what is there in them? I like books and music, and want to keep up my studies. Phil wants me to do so, and says he will study with me and read with me. We could be very happy together, Phil and I. We could have such a sweet, cozy little home! I'm sure, mamma, you will regret it if you insist on making us both unhappy. Papa is willing that we should be married at any time—he is very fond of Phil."

"So am I very fond of Phil, my dear—just as fond as your father, and I realize that what you say about a cozy home and happiness is all very true; but your father has no taste, as you know, for society. He cannot understand the pleasures to be had from it or the advantages it gives one. I have only one motive in the position I take, and that is your greater happiness. I am sure it would be a mistake for you to marry now, or even to become engaged. A girl can be young only once in her life. If she misses the pleasures that properly belong to youth, as I missed them, she can never regain them."

"But you have been very happy, mamma. Papa has done everything for you, and has been devoted to you. You have seen the world and society, and have everything that money can bring."

"That is true, my child. No man could do more for a wife than he has done for me, and no man could be a better husband; but married life has its responsibilities and cares. I had not finished my education when I was married, and before I was eighteen you were born. The mother who is the mother that she should be can never be the light-hearted girl, free from care, however young she is. Suppose, instead of becoming a wife at sixteen, I had gone to school, as you have, until I was as old as you are now, and that after that I had had five or six years of girl pleasures, and then had married your father—wouldn't my life have been fuller and more complete?"

"But perhaps you would not have married papa. Perhaps he would not have waited for you." Marion said this with a shudder—the thought suggesting that possibly Phil might not wait for her.

"Of course, that is possible," replied her mother; "but a girl's chance of marrying well ought to be better rather than worse if she waits until she is old enough to have some judgment. She will have met many men, and will know better how to estimate their merits and defects. The simple fact

that I made so desirable a match at my age doesn't prove that early marriages for girls bring better husbands. With you, my dear, it is not a question of a desirable man. Phil is perfectly satisfactory to me, as he is to your father. It is a question of your managing your life so that you will get the greatest happiness and make it the most useful."

"I cannot see that society is likely to make it more useful or more happy," replied Marion.

"Society certainly broadens one."

"Does it not also narrow one?"

"It may in some ways, but not as a whole. It gives one a better idea of people and human nature in general. Pope, you know, said, 'The proper study of mankind is man.'"

III

MARION did not enter into society with the enthusiasm her mother had hoped for. She responded very slowly to the flattering reception given her, but responded, nevertheless, manifesting from week to week a deeper interest in the people she met and in the doings of the social world.

The fact that she was the only child of the rich Matthew Kingsley made her a very desirable catch. Beaux, varying in age from the youth of the insipid order of the "dude" to the old man whose earthly career was nearly finished, paid her devoted attention. Fortune hunters gathered about her, each trying to outdo the other in his efforts to win her hand. She was flattered, admired, sought after, and there was a certain sense of pleasure in all this. No debutante received more attention than she, and few shared equal honors with her.

This social triumph delighted Mrs. Kingsley. Her ambition for Marion was certainly growing. She could see a great success ahead for her daughter, and her heart was filled with pride—a just pride, since she was sincere in the belief that this sort of life would bring the largest measure of pleasure and happiness to Marion.

There was a coterie of antique, fossilized bachelors who had held sway for many years in the social circle to which Marion had recently been admitted. Each season they were assiduous in their attentions to the favorite debutantes. Marion received a generous share of their flattery.

One of the most conspicuous members of the coterie was J. Harrington Van Stump,

a sleek old man, of full threescore, very bald, but otherwise well preserved. Van Stump was worth ten millions in tangible property, according to popular estimate, to say nothing of his own individual worth. This was regarded as very great in connection with the ten millions. Divorced from the latter, there would have been a marvelous shrinkage in the personal value of J. Harrington Van Stump as a factor in the world, and especially as a matrimonial possibility in the world of fashion.

But ten millions plus Van Stump—or, to be more respectful, Van Stump plus ten millions—considered as a whole, was irresistible, viewed from his standpoint, or from the standpoint of any girl who would willingly encumber herself with this respectable piece of antiquity for the sake of being a widow at the end of a few years, plus the millions of her late lamented husband.

Van Stump lost no opportunity to impress Marion with the fact of his riches, and, as was his way, he aimed to make her feel that she was his ideal—the one girl he had seen in his life that he could love. This devotion annoyed Marion.

"He's so silly," she said to her mother. "What does he think—that I want to marry him for his money? Surely he can't be foolish enough to imagine that I could love him!"

"He doesn't mean anything, dear," answered Mrs. Kingsley. "It is simply his way."

"Well, I think it is a very poor way, and I don't like it. I wish he wouldn't bother me!"

"You shouldn't feel so. Everything said in the drawing-room is not meant seriously. I hope you will show me that you are too clever to offend Mr. Van Stump simply because you do not fancy him."

"What shall I do—try to make him believe I am in love with him?"

"That would not be clever, even if you were in love with him. Simply treat him pleasantly. His position demands that. You cannot afford to snub him—a man who entertains as he does, and who is to be found at almost every social function of importance."

IV

UNTIL the day Phil Derringforth asked Marion to be his wife, his heart had been as light as the clear, sweet air of the mountains. He had known nothing of sorrow

beyond the little annoyances that sadden the hearts of children and in an hour are forgotten forever. His career had been without the discipline gained in the severe school of adversity and denial. He was not prepared for the answer that Marion gave him. It was a blow that paralyzed his hopes and purposes.

The idea of a refusal or postponement had never occurred to him. The disappointment was keen. His soul was embittered and gloomy. There was no sweetness in it, only the dregs that poison. A transformation in his nature had begun. The sunshine had taken wings. Character is as susceptible to the influence of a thought or an act as the physical system is susceptible to the presence of a drug.

Derrington's will had never before been thwarted. The experience was a new sensation to him—a revelation. He was in a rebellious mood, and elements in his nature that had hitherto been dormant now awoke and began to assert themselves. He exaggerated Mrs. Kingsley's offense—for to him it was an offense for which he could see no justification. He looked at the matter wholly from his own point of view, and shut his eyes to the fact that there might be another side worthy of consideration.

He knew that he loved Marion deeply, devotedly. He was old enough to marry, and had the means to marry. He did his own thinking, and was intolerant of interference. Mrs. Kingsley had taken this office upon herself simply, as he argued, to satisfy a silly fancy—to see Marion flattered and talked about in the social world.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed in a petulant tone and with a sweep of the hand that spoke volumes.

In this frame of mind he naturally sought to avoid Mrs. Kingsley, but this involved the loss of intercourse with Marion—a deprivation that was like parting with his own heart, for she was to him as his very life; and yet he felt an indefinable resentment against her. She had not told him of her pleading with her mother. He knew only the answer she gave him, and the thought forced itself into his mind that she had not been so much in earnest as she might well have been.

He did not like to harbor this feeling, and condemned himself for giving place to the thought. He attempted to force it from his mind, but it came back, and each time it was harder to dislodge.

He had no compunctions in placing the blame on Mrs. Kingsley. At first he tried not to think too harshly of her, but now he no longer attempted any restraint upon his feelings. His love for her was gone, but Marion—no, he would not allow himself to accuse her, for with the suspicion that she had fallen short of what he expected of her came the feeling that the very foundation of things was crumbling.

His disquietude increased as he dwelt upon his disappointment, and he sought relief in scenes that had hitherto possessed no attraction for him. They possessed no attraction for him now, but they did serve to distract his thoughts.

Often his footsteps turned in the direction of the Kingsleys' when he went out from his home at night. Sometimes he called on Marion—sometimes he forced himself to walk resolutely by the house. He found that he was about as likely to see her in the one case as in the other, unless he had previously made a special appointment. It was the height of the season, and her evenings were almost all given to social engagements.

"I would so much rather have you come in, Phil, as you used to," she said in a note to him, "than go at the pace I am going, spending all my time with people in whom I have little interest; but there is no moderation in this life. If one happens to be in favor, she must go all the time, or she will offend some one. It is either all or none. I am crowding half a dozen years into this one season, so that mamma will be satisfied, as I am sure she will be, and then we can marry and have our dear little home and be so happy! I only wish you would go out with me. You would not find society such a horrible bore as you imagine; but I suppose I might as well think of flying as attempt to induce you to do what you don't want to do. Come and see me very soon—you don't know how I miss you. You are not a bit neighborly. What has changed you so? I hope no other attachment—no, I won't say it, won't allow myself to think the thought that would make me miserable."

"What has changed me so?" meditated Derrington, and he took up the letter and read the sentence a second time. "Changed me!" he repeated, with the suggestion of a cloud gathering on his brow. "The change isn't in me!"

One rarely sees a change in himself; but,

as he changes, his point of view shifts, and then he thinks others have changed, not himself. Marion was yielding to the influence of her new associations. Derrington was yielding to the influence of the thoughts that embittered his soul, as well as to that of the associations he had recently sought. Each had drifted a little away from the other, and each felt that the other had done all the drifting.

But they were still not far apart. A word, a look, a pressure of the hand, might have closed up the gap.

The word was not spoken, the look was not given, the pressure of the hand was withheld.

V

DERRINGTON's father started in life as a civil engineer, but he was not the sort of man to continue working for others. He was little more than a boy when he took his first contract to build a short line of railroad. The work did not require large capital, but it involved the expenditure of much more than he possessed. He made up the deficiency by financiering, and in this he was successful, as was also his earliest effort at railroad building.

The first contract had scarcely been completed when he undertook another and a more difficult piece of engineering. In this, too, he was successful, and at the end of a few years Warren Derrington became known as a man of energy and daring.

But his merit was his fault.

It was this boldness that had made him what he was; it was this same boldness that endangered his career. He was a heavy borrower, but withal managed his affairs so well that his credit stood high in the market. Paper bearing his name was never refused. Each year added to the extent of his undertakings. They expanded faster than his capital, but with this expansion came a like increase of skill as a financier.

Some years he made large profits; in others his losses were heavy. In the one case, as in the other, he never wanted for ready money, and no one could have divined from his manner the burden of risk he was bearing.

But there came a time when all this was changed. The firm was now Derrington & Derrington. There was a sudden pinch in the money market. For the first time in the history of the house its paper was re-

fused. Money had to be raised to meet maturing obligations, and to carry on the vast enterprises the Derringtons were engineering.

It was merely a question of tiding over a few days, Mr. Derrington told himself. This must be done at any cost, or the structure of a life's work would fall with a mighty crash. But how should the money be raised? It must be done quietly. The slightest suspicion of weakness, and all would be over. The name of Derrington would be ground to earth, and the hand that had been a power in the world would lose its magic touch.

There was no time to be lost. Relief must be had, and quickly, or it would be too late. Inaction meant ruin. Something extraordinary must be done. What should it be?

Warren Derrington walked back and forth in his office and thought—thought as a man thinks when the pressure upon him is crushing out his very life. Presently he stepped to the door and called to his son.

"We are face to face with a crisis, Phil," said he. "We must raise fifty thousand dollars within three days or we are lost. The ordinary channels for raising money are closed to us. There remains but one thing to be done. We must find a Shylock—you must find him."

VI

J. HARRINGTON VAN STUMP lived alone with his servants in a large, richly furnished house in a fashionable neighborhood in New York.

It was midnight. A narrow-chested man with sloping shoulders and sharp features shuffled up the steps of the Van Stump mansion and pulled the bell nervously. The house was ablaze with lights. The door was thrown open, and the warm air, scented with the odor of flowers and sweet perfume, fanned his cadaverous cheeks. The sound of music and many voices reached his ears.

He hesitated before speaking, and then said timidly:

"I have come—I fear I have come at an inopportune time. I didn't know—you see I didn't know of this party. I will wait—if you please—I will wait in the basement until the fête is over. I have an important communication for Mr. Van Stump."

Among the last of the guests to take their leave were the Kingsleys. Marion had

never looked prettier. Her face was flushed with the excitement of the evening. She gave her hand to Van Stump and said good night, thanking him for the pleasure he had given her. The feeling of her hand within his own, her beauty, and the sweetness of her voice quickened for an instant the pulsations of his heart—a heart that had rarely beaten faster or slower because of the joys or sorrows that move men of warm blood.

His eyes followed her as she passed out of the room. The look was not that of love. It was something akin to that of the miser gazing through a broker's window at a heap of gold coins.

The last guest was gone, and Van Stump threw himself wearily into a chair. He had excelled himself as a genial host. He knew how to entertain, and did it generously—did it as one whose heart is full of sweetness and warmth. An analysis of his nature would have puzzled a philosopher.

The butler handed a card to Van Stump. It bore the name "Martin Strum."

"Strum!" said Van Stump, frowning. "What does he want at this time of night? Take him to the library, and I will be there directly."

Strum bowed and apologized for intruding at so late an hour. When he had humbled himself sufficiently before this modern Cæsus, in whose presence he keenly felt his own meanness of soul, he said what he had come to say—that he had clients who must have fifty thousand dollars on the following day.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" exclaimed Van Stump, throwing up his hands in horror.

"It is a big sum," replied Strum timidly.

"A big sum indeed, and money's very tight."

"They expect to pay for the use of it," insinuated Strum.

"Of course, but the demand for money is something to turn one's head. I have never seen anything like it."

"You are quite right, sir, quite right," assented Strum. "I told my clients so."

"You gave them to understand that the loan would cost a snug sum?"

"Indeed I did, sir."

"Did you name any amount?"

"I said I didn't know where it could be raised even if they were willing to pay ten per cent a month."

"And they still wanted you to get it?

Their needs must be urgent indeed; but you are too modest, Strum, too modest. The money can't be raised at that price in these times."

"Perhaps they would pay more," pleaded Strum.

"But the security—you have looked into that?"

"There is the pinch, sir. They could raise money on a mortgage, but that's just what they want to avoid."

"I see!" said Van Stump, with a selfish gleam in his eyes. "What did you say their name is?"

"Here is their card, sir."

"Derringforth!" exclaimed Van Stump. "The Derringforths in trouble?"

His interest was alive now.

"They are carrying on large enterprises, and this pinch has caught them; but they are well rated, and the father has a house worth ninety thousand dollars on which there is no lien. Besides this, a great deal of money is due them on contracts partially completed. They have, too, a lot of unlisted securities that they regard as good, but that are not acceptable as collateral in the present state of the market."

"And these securities are the collateral they offer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Securities that would not bring a dollar in the market?"

"Possibly, sir."

"And they expect you to raise fifty thousand dollars on collateral that no bank would take?"

"If the collateral were gilt edge they would not seek money through me, sir. They came to me with their eyes open, understanding that if they got it, they would have to pay for it."

"And you must go to them with your eyes open—wide open. Sift their affairs to the bottom—mind you, to the bottom!"

"I will go as far into their affairs as they will allow me."

"Allow you, did you say—allow you?" cried Van Stump, rising in well simulated wrath.

"I hope I have not offended you, sir. I am very sorry—I am indeed sorry," apologized Strum, wringing his hands.

"You are too easily frightened, Strum; you lack nerve. I like bold men about me—men not afraid to do as I tell them. The Derringforths want money, and must have it. It's not for them to *allow* anything.

They're at your mercy. Flaunt the money in their faces, and they'll show you their very souls if you demand it. You're not seeking an investment; they're seeking a loan. But be diplomatic—remember, diplomatic. There may be game here worth the chase."

"You can depend upon me, sir, to follow your instructions strictly," replied Strum obsequiously.

"Very good, do so, and keep a sharp watch for a twist, Strum—a twist—you understand?"

"I understand."

"You wouldn't mind making a fee—a modest fee for yourself, I dare say, if they were forced to the wall," insinuated Van Stump.

"I need the money, Heaven knows, sir," answered Strum eagerly.

"Keep your wits about you, then, and bring me a correct statement of their affairs. Come to me to-morrow at twelve."

VII

"It's outrageous, father," said young Derringforth, white with indignation. "I would have thrown the fellow out of the office. He is a robber—twenty per cent a month, two hundred and forty per cent a year, ten thousand dollars for the use of fifty thousand and for only thirty days. Why, it's damnable!"

"So it is, Phil—damnable in the extreme; but we had better pay four times ten thousand than have our paper go to protest," replied the father.

"But the impudence of the cur—think of his prying into our affairs as he did! I could hardly keep my hands off him."

"I feel as strongly as you do, Phil, against him and his class; but we are in his power, and must accept his terms or go to the wall."

"Wouldn't it be better to call a halt than to place ourselves in the hands of such a heartless scoundrel?"

"Call a halt? Never so long as the name of Derringforth can be kept afloat, though there be extortion on top of extortion, and yet extortion on top of that!"

The fifty thousand dollars was secured. The foundation for the "twist" was laid.

The stringency in the money market continued. A week went by, and the fifty thousand was gone. Another loan must be had, or all would be lost. Strum was ap-

pealed to again, and again the house of the Derringforths was humiliated. The loan was increased to one hundred thousand, on terms increasingly extortionate. The twist had taken hold.

Matters grew worse with the Derringforths. The market became easier, and still their paper was refused. There was a mysterious something in the manner of bankers that Mr. Derringforth could not understand. He sought an explanation, but was put off with small doses of sugar-coated deception. He tried to unravel the mystery. Surely all obligations had been met as promptly as ever. Why, then, should he not have, as he always had had, the confidence of financial institutions? Was not the business of the house larger than ever before, and were not its contracts yielding exceptional profits?

But speculation as to the cause of the situation availed nothing. They must have money, money, money, and that quickly, or the herculean efforts he had made to tide over the squeeze would have been put forth to no purpose.

The twist was beginning to be felt.

Strum was appealed to a third time. The money was advanced. The twist took another turn, and the Derringforths winced.

A friend came to them and told them it was whispered about that they were in financial trouble—that they had been paying exorbitant prices for money.

"This explains the mystery," said Mr. Derringforth, looking like one who had been betrayed. "It is plain now why our paper has been refused!"

But he was at a loss to understand from whence the report issued.

"And the motive," he meditated. "Only Strum knows of the loan, and it is for his interest to say nothing."

Van Stump could have enlightened him as to the motive. It was a part of the twist.

VIII

WITH the advent of Lent, the Kingsleys joined a party that was to go to California. The Derringforths were invited, and Mrs. Derringforth urged her husband to accept the invitation, but he said that he could not leave his business.

"I wish, dear, you wouldn't work so hard," she answered. "Your ambition will lead you to the grave. You look worried and worn out."

The husband tried to laugh away his

wife's forebodings, but the idea remained with him. Truth pierces the heart, while words of lighter import glance off without the trace of an impress.

"It would do you a world of good," pleaded Mrs. Derrington, "to take this California trip, and I should like so much to go myself."

"I should like to go, dear, and especially on your account. It grieves me to think you should miss this pleasure. I wish you would reconsider your decision and go without me."

"I should find no pleasure in the trip without you. The thought of your working like a galley slave at home would haunt me the whole time."

"But suppose you and Phil go. He has buckled down to business like a veteran, and needs the change far more than I. Besides, Marion will be one of the party. Think of this, and make up your mind to go. I shall be happier knowing that you and Phil are happier. Your interests are more to me than money, though you think my ambition will lead me to the grave. It isn't that I'm so ambitious for great wealth. At my time of life I would prefer to take it more quietly; but a man can't always do as he would wish. One has a business and it expands beyond his design—almost beyond his control, sometimes. It runs itself, in a way, and takes him along with it; but I am going to draw in the lines so that I shall have more leisure for you and for myself."

"I should think you might go with us, Phil—with me," pleaded Marion in her most persuasive way.

"I wish I could, little girl," he said, his heart yearning to say yes. "Six weeks with you would be life again to me, but it is impossible for me to get away."

"Impossible!" she repeated the word. How strangely it sounded as she said it! Her disappointment could not have been more forcefully expressed.

"But there are some obstacles," he hastened to say, "that one cannot possibly overcome."

"Love should know no obstacles," replied Marion, almost sharply.

"You question my love, then?" said Derrington, the hot blood rushing to his cheeks.

A few months before he would not have uttered these words, and even now he would have given his right hand to recall

them. Marion flushed—not so much at what he had said as at his manner of saying it. She hesitated before speaking.

"Phil, we mustn't go on in this way," she said sweetly. "Let us avoid anything that would cause us regret;" and she extended her hand to him in token of good faith.

He took it in his own, and there was love and penitence and hope in the pressure he gave it.

"I'm so sorry," he said tenderly. "I'm hardly myself to-day."

"You haven't been yourself, Phil, for a long time. What has changed you so?"

"Can you ask? Don't you know?"

"But you promised to be brave and help me wait patiently. Must I help you?"

"I think I need the help more than you."

It was Phil's heart that said these words, not his head—a heart distracted by business troubles and crying out bitterly in its loneliness.

IX

THE Kingsleys separated from the party in San Francisco, and went to visit the Edwardses, who had a large ranch in southern California. Kingsley and Edwards had been boys together in New England a generation before. The one had found his way to the metropolis and the other to the Far West. Each had grown rich in worldly possessions, though the Westerner had more to show for his life than the metropolitan, for the number of his children was a round half dozen, while Marion alone was the Kingsley heir.

The oldest of the Edwards children was a young man of twenty-four, tall, broad-chested, and straight, with light hair worn long, and a complexion as fair as a woman's. He was as picturesque a fellow as ever played havoc with the heart of a girl. He was the embodiment of human nature—generous, gay, unrestrained—a natural man with big heart and abounding health. He had grown up in the saddle, and was as perfect a horseman as the most dashing product of the frontier. He was a child of nature, as sweet as a girl, as chivalrous as a knight of old. Such was Burton Edwards as Marion Kingsley saw him—such he was in fact.

The Edwardses were delightful people, and made the Kingsleys as much at home as if they had been kin of their own. Sallie, the next in age to Burton, was but a year

younger than Marion. She had the ingenuous, whole-souled, sunny disposition of her brother. Marion was charmed with her, and told herself that she had never before seen human nature in such attractive guise, where such perfect sincerity and childlike freedom throbbed with every pulsation of the heart.

Marion had been with the Edwardses barely an hour when she was "Marion" to every one. Formality had no place in that delightful ranch life, untrammelled by the conventionality of the city, which dries up the springs of sweetness and simplicity and makes the heart the abode of cant and artificiality.

As it was "Marion" with Burton and Sallie, so it was "Burton" and "Sallie" with Marion. The three entered into the sports of ranch life with the zest and enthusiasm of children; and children they were in fact, without a care or a thought to mar their happiness.

Not a thought—no, that would hardly be true, for Marion had left behind her a lover, the playmate of her childhood, the light of her life. Yes, she had a thought for Phil, poor boy, who was toiling while she was playing, working for her and the home they were some day to share together. But that home and that some day—how indefinite now, and how real it had been but a few months before!

Her life was crowded with pleasures and intoxicated by the association with two natures that were as a stimulant to her own. She marveled at the things she did, the miles she rode, the tennis she played, the dances she danced.

"You shall ride Dick to-day, Marion," said Burton, when she had been at the ranch a week. Dick was his own horse, a thoroughbred, and the finest in the county.

"Ride Dick! I ride Dick!" she answered. "Nothing would delight me so much—he's such a beauty, but I can't allow myself to take him from you."

"Don't think of that," replied Burton, in his free, generous way. "He shall be yours all the time you are with us. I'll ride Bruno. He's an ugly beast, but I'm in the mood to tame him. We'll have great sport now. Sallie's horse is a good match for Bruno. The races we'll have will be something to remember when you get back to New York."

"I'm sure they will, but they won't be the only delightful remembrance. I

couldn't forget the many things you have done for my pleasure; and now, to crown all, you give up your horse to me!"

"That's nothing," laughed Burton. "We are the debtors, for you are giving us more pleasure than it's possible for us to give you."

"Oh, what extravagance!" protested Marion.

"Not a bit," answered Burton. "I put it not strongly enough, rather than too strongly. It's a rare thing to have a New York girl with us, you know, and it's particularly rare to have one who is so congenial, one who enters into our wild life with such enthusiasm as you do."

The days passed by unnumbered, one following another so quickly that there was no beginning, no ending. The Kingsleys had been at the ranch three weeks, and the visit was to end on the morrow.

Burton and Marion went out for their last ride together. Sallie remained at home. Was the cause assigned genuine or counterfeit, Marion asked herself? At all events she was glad that Burton and she were alone, and yet she was conscious of a feeling that it would be better if Sallie were with them.

Dick had been equipped with special trappings in her honor. She appreciated this. What woman does not love these little attentions? They appeal with peculiar force to the feminine heart. The day was bright and the air was clear and exhilarating. Dick was in fine form and eager for a dash; but there was a feeling of depression that Burton and Marion shared alike. It was the thought of her leaving for the East on the following day. It hung over them like a cloud, and pursued them whether the horses were racing in full gallop or walking slowly beneath the spreading branches of the great trees.

Marion leaned forward and patted Dick's neck.

"You shall have him for your own, Marion. I will give him to you," said Burton, impulsively.

"Give Dick to me! Oh, no, you don't mean that," replied Marion.

"I do indeed."

"But I couldn't think of taking him away from you."

"I wish you would. I should be happier in the thought that he was giving you pleasure than in riding him myself."

"I thank you so much. I wish I could

make you feel how deeply I appreciate the offer, and your thought for my happiness; but papa wouldn't allow me to accept so valuable a present. It wouldn't be right."

Burton felt that he was not making the progress he had hoped for. The horses were walking now, and he and Marion rode silently on, side by side. Neither said anything for a little time. Finally Burton raised his head and turned toward Marion. There was love in his eyes as they met hers, and he spoke softly, tenderly.

Marion felt what was coming, and strove to save him the humiliation. Time after time she adroitly turned the conversation—turned it so cleverly that Burton did not suspect her motive; but the strong, passionate love that swayed his heart could not be so easily repressed. Again and again he came back to the subject, almost abruptly at times, and as often she led him to a different theme, always with such gentle tact and perfect skill that he could scarce discern she divined his purpose.

It was will against will, and the will of the woman won. She had saved him, and had saved herself the pain of refusing him.

The next day she said good-by. He prolonged his hold upon her hand and looked the words he fain would have spoken.

"I shall see you in New York before very long, Marion," he said, as he handed her into the carriage. He tried to speak lightly, but his voice betrayed his feelings.

That last look was photographed upon Marion's mind, and as she journeyed homeward it was ever with her.

"I am very sorry for him, poor fellow," she said to herself. "I had no idea that he cared for me—that he loved me—until the day we went riding alone. I cannot think it was my fault. How strange it all seems, and it makes me so uncomfortable! Perhaps I am to blame—just a little. Perhaps I ought not to have seen so much of him, but I couldn't very well make myself disagreeable, and besides, I liked him. It can't be a crime for a girl to like a man when he interests her; and Burton is such a delightful fellow! But he shouldn't have fallen in love, I wonder why people do such foolish things! Phil and I never fell in love—and I was there only three weeks. Perhaps, though, I should have told him something of Phil; but what could I have said? Phil and I are not engaged. Mama didn't wish us to be engaged. If we had been, I could have said so, and that

would have saved him. I'm not sure, though; sometimes men fall in love with engaged girls. I wonder if he would have done that! Well, he will forget all about me in a little while, and then he will laugh at his folly—yes, forget all about me;" and there was a perceptible sigh.

Was it an expression of sorrow for Burton Edwards or the moan of a heart pierced by Cupid's arrow?

X

SPRING melted into summer, summer vanished into fall, and fall faded into winter; and with winter came in a season of unparalleled gayety. Marion was on the crest of the wave.

Phil had seen comparatively little of her since her departure for California. He had not been out of town, and she had spent few days in town. Throughout the hot weather he had worked with hardly the loss of an hour. It was a struggle for existence, and side by side with his father he strove to avert the crash. They were still in the toils of Van Stump.

Phil showed the effects of the strain he had undergone. His father wore deeper marks of torture. The twist had squeezed him hardest.

Strum was obsequious and snaky. The cold grasp behind him, the hand that turned the screws, was as yet unknown to either Mr. Derringforth or his son. They had succeeded in keeping the knowledge of their distress from the public. Beyond the whisperings—the insinuations that came from Van Stump, with the purpose of injuring their credit, that he might bleed them the deeper—nothing was known of the heroism with which father and son fought the fierce fight—a hand-to-hand combat that tried the mettle of their souls.

Marion knew nothing of all this. She felt that Derringforth had neglected and avoided her. She had never quite forgiven him for his refusal to go with her on the California trip. He had assigned no cause other than that it was impossible to get away. This did not satisfy her. It should not have satisfied her. She felt that at least she should have his confidence.

"He should have mine," she told herself. "Love should know no secrets."

This was her feeling at that time; but did she tell him all about Burton Edwards, of Burton's love for her and the impress he had left upon her own heart, that pic-

turesque, chivalrous son of the West? She had intended to go over it all with Derrington, to make a clean breast and free her heart from this feeling of guilt—a feeling that clung to her like a black shadow. He, too, had intended to confide in her the cause of his inability to accompany her; but the conversation had taken a turn that made this awkward, and she went West with the feeling that he had grown cold and indifferent.

The first time she saw Derrington after returning to New York there seemed to be no suitable opportunity to unburden her soul to him. She tried to shape matters so that she could begin the confession without abruptness, but all her efforts were frustrated. He always happened to say the very thing that she did not wish him to say.

With this thought in her mind there was an unnatural restraint about her manner that Derrington was quick to notice. It had the effect of chilling his spirits. Each experienced a feeling of awkwardness. A cloud settled down upon them, and the evening went by and Derrington was gone and Marion's heart was heavy.

Once the confession had been put off, the difficulties in making it increased in number and strength. In a few days Marion went to the country. Derrington never came there to see her, though she was but a few hundred miles away. She felt hurt, and would not allow herself to ask why he could not come. He had chosen to stay away, and gave her no reason for doing so, save that he could not take an hour from business. This seemed scarcely credible.

The secret that had haunted her at first was less troublesome now. The black shadow had been dispelled.

After a time she was back in New York again. Derrington was beginning to lose the boyish lines in his face. He seemed a good deal changed—had grown subdued and serious. She speculated over the transformation, and the longer she pondered the more distant he seemed.

He, also, had done much thinking. His heart ached with an ache that was death to his hopes. The year would be ended in another week—the year that he had been asked to wait. Seven days more, and he would go to her and reopen the subject—only seven days. Oh, that a stroke of fortune might free him from the grasp of the cold, bony hand that had him by the

throat! Only this, and then he could go to Marion with the love that had grown up with him and was his life, fiber of his fiber, soul of his soul.

XI

MARION sat at her writing desk, deep in thought. A picture of Derrington stood before her, and beside it lay an open letter from him. She took up her pen to answer it, but there was irresolution in the act. The pen dropped from her fingers, and her head drooped upon her hands.

The letter had brought her face to face with a doubt that had haunted her of late, but which she had shrunk from considering seriously. She had drifted toward it day by day, hoping in that indefinite, vague way in which women more than men are wont to hope, that somehow the question would be solved for her.

She had had a year of social life since the day when she pleaded with her mother for permission to become engaged to Derrington. Then she saw nothing attractive in society, and prayed for the quiet little home of her dreams, with music and books and the man she loved. Now the gay world throbbed with a thousand pulsations that fascinated her. Her point of view had shifted. Then she was the debutante, uncertain of herself, looking upon social life as one sees a play. Now she was playing a part in that life—playing it with an enthusiasm that was irresistible.

We are too apt to condemn that of which we know little or nothing. There are few strictures one hears more frequently than those on the society of which the speaker's knowledge is extremely limited. There is a tendency to rail at that which is beyond us. Every phase of life has its pleasures, and doubtless those who speak most severely of the inner circle of society would gladly enter it, and, once in, would blush at the thought of their previous narrowness.

With Marion, a year ago, it wasn't that she couldn't enter it, but rather that she didn't desire to. As she saw it then, it was unattractive, insincere—a butterfly life at best. Her thoughts had set in a different direction.

But human nature is malleable. A twelvemonth in the social world, and she liked it. The air was exhilarating and delightful. The people were charming, and there was a kaleidoscopic variety of entertainments that precluded the presence of a

dull minute. There was a mild intoxication about this that lifted her above the level of the old days.

Her enjoyment then was one of contentment. Now it was one of excitement. Some one was always planning and doing something for her happiness, and she exerted herself to give happiness in return. It was a high pressure life, in which friction was reduced to a minimum, and the hours flew by unnoticed save for the sweet-scented memories that warmed her heart to quicker action—memories of the ballroom, of social triumphs, of coaching trips, of riding and yachting, of tobogganing and the music of the sleigh bells, of the opera and dinners and receptions, of the attention she had received, the flowers that had been showered upon her, and the love she had inspired—not maliciously, merely incidentally, yet she was not dull to the pleasures it had brought her. Hers was the heart of a woman, susceptible to a stimulant so delicious—a stimulant as insidious in its effect as the opium drug.

She loved Derringforth as a matter of course. The thought had never occurred to her that she could love any one else; but was she quite ready to give up all these pleasures?

"I couldn't go out without Phil, if we were engaged," she meditated. "Even if I could, there would be no pleasure for me. The devotion that is paid me now would vanish, and I should find myself suddenly grown frightfully uninteresting. There are so many good times I could have this winter!" she continued with downcast eyes. "The season is only fairly begun, and it was never so gay, and my engagements run away ahead."

She took up Derringforth's letter and read it over again.

"I hope you can give me next Thursday evening," he wrote. "The year we were asked to wait will have passed. I know you are very busy socially, but the matter for us to consider means far more to you and me than an evening's pleasure."

"I wish he hadn't added that last sentence!" Marion said to herself, almost petulantly. "It sounds as if he thinks I care more for a good time than for him and his happiness. He knows that isn't so. I'm sure I care for him as much as ever. Simply because I want to enjoy a few more months of girl life doesn't prove that I love Phil any the less. I'm sure it doesn't. If

it were necessary, I would give up everything for him, and very gladly; but, as mamma says, there is no good reason for rushing into the cares of married life. A year ago I couldn't think she was right, but I'm older now, and I've had a chance to see something of the world. Yes, mamma was right—think of what I should have missed if I had become engaged then, and—suppose I were to become engaged now!"

Marion spoke these last words with a little shudder, and in desperation got up from her desk, went to the window, and looked out into the street.

A cold east wind was blowing, and snow was beginning to fall. A beggar rang the basement bell of the house opposite. He was thinly and shabbily dressed, and was white with age. He came away from the rich man's door with a piece of dry bread, which he began eating. Marion saw his face as he gained the sidewalk. It was pinched and blue, but withal showed lines of refinement. Her heart ached for him as he shambled along the street, facing the cold, piercing, wintry wind, and gnawing at the bread as he went.

"It's cruel," she cried, "to let a human being suffer in this way—turning him off with a crust of cold bread on a bitter day like this!"

She flew downstairs and sent the butler after the old man. Marion met him at the basement door and asked him into the kitchen, where a hot fire was burning in the great range.

"You are very kind, young lady, to send for me," said the beggar, still shivering.

"I saw you from my warm room," answered Marion. "You are hungry and cold."

Her kind words and soft, sweet voice were too much for the old man. He had struggled to keep back the tears, but now they stole down his hollow cheeks. He brushed them away with the sleeve of his coat, and said, speaking as one who had known something of refinement:

"I must ask you to excuse me—this is all so unexpected. I am not accustomed to such kindness, but I am grateful to you, young lady—very grateful."

Marion had a hot meal prepared, which consisted of sirloin steak, hashed potatoes browned, dry toast, and coffee with cream. This was the beggar's breakfast, and Marion served it with her own hands. Never man ate with greater relish or the expres-

sion of more sincere thanks. Every look and act showed gratitude, and Marion learned something of that finest sense of happiness—the happiness that comes from helping others.

With a heart glowing with warmth she went back to her desk and again took up her pen to answer Derrington's note. Her irresolution was gone.

"I am glad you want me to save Thursday evening for you," she began. "It shall be yours, and yours only. I shall be at home to no one else. I know I am very busy, as you say, but it is not such a hardship for me to give up an evening to you, Phil, even if I missed the greatest event of the season. Come in early, as you used to. You shouldn't be ceremonious with me. We never were ceremonious with each other, you know, and it doesn't befit us."

She ran her eye over the note when it was finished.

"There, that's more as I should talk to Phil," she said to herself. "Poor dear Phil!" and she caught up the photograph before her and kissed it impulsively.

At four o'clock Marion began a round of receptions. She took a subscription paper with her, and importuned her men friends in behalf of the beggar whom she had fed. Her father's name headed the list, with fifty dollars opposite it. Whether skirting along on the edge of disaster or hoarding millions with the greed of a miser, it mattered not a whit, none dared refuse her. She told the story of the morning, how she had seen the old man begging a morsel of bread and shivering from the cold wind; told of her sending for him, and of his gratitude; told of the misfortune that had brought him to beggary—a man who had known the comforts of home and the refining and sustaining influence of a wife.

Some there were who feigned skepticism and attempted to force the laugh upon her, saying that she had been cleverly taken in; but this was a ruse that fell short, and all who had thus sought to protect their gold made quick to recover the ground they had lost. This bit of strategy, this vile pretense, is the shield behind which meanness seeks shelter; it is the resort of the hypocrite and the miser, the subterfuge of him whose miserable soul knows not the throb of a kindly impulse.

Honest poverty starves and is trampled under foot before the eyes of such men, and never a twinge of conscience ruffles the sur-

face of their cold blood. It is only when forced, in self-defense, in sustaining pride or place, that their purse strings unloose to charity. It was pressure such as this that drew from flint-hearted men subscriptions to Marion's paper. Cornered beyond escape, they signed their names with a show of pleasure—a bad counterfeit of the feeling of the generous giver—cursing inwardly, meanwhile, the beggar and the fair hand that had filched their dollars from them.

Van Stump was one of these, and, curiously enough, at the mention of the old man's name he was a good deal startled. Marion saw this, and noted the sudden paleness of his face.

"Why, Mr. Van Stump," she said in a tone of surprise, "you don't know him?"

"Know him—I know this beggar?" replied Van Stump. "Well, well, this is good!" and he laughed a forced sort of laugh.

"I was mistaken, I am sure—you will pardon me, I know," replied Marion.

"Certainly," said Van Stump, "and I hope you will pardon me for laughing at your question—the idea struck me as so odd, you know. To be serious, now, how much money do you wish to raise—a competency for the old fellow to retire on?"

"You shouldn't banter in that way, Mr. Van Stump. I'm really interested in this little bit of charity, and I hope you will help me."

"Certainly I will help you, but you haven't answered my question as to the amount you hope to raise for this deserving charity."

There was a stress on the words "deserving charity" that nettled Marion.

"The sum I have undertaken to raise is only three hundred dollars," she answered diplomatically, "and I have a good part of it already. Three hundred dollars will get the old man into the Chapin Home for the Aged and Infirm, and, once in there, there will be no further expense. He will be well taken care of, clothed, and fed. Now isn't this a charity worth while?"

"Most excellent," answered Van Stump. "In fact, it strikes me that something of the sort would be a good thing for every man too lazy to work."

"You can say the most sarcastic things, Mr. Van Stump! I shall be afraid of you if you go on much longer in this way."

"I certainly could not permit that, Miss Kingsley; but it's odd to see you taking

such an interest in this old beggar. Why in this one more than others, and why not give up all your time to beggars? You are such a charming little—shall I say it?—beggar yourself. No one could resist your appeals.”

“How you do like to tease! But I won’t allow you to tease me. The reason I feel a special interest in this old man is that his case is peculiarly pathetic.”

“I suppose every beggar thinks his case is peculiarly pathetic,” replied Van Stump.

His sarcasm began to be irritating to Marion, and, casting a quick glance at him, she said:

“When a person gets to a point where he has no faith in any one or anything, I pity him. As for myself, I don’t doubt the old man’s story. There are sharks on land as well as in the sea, and it was one of them that brought him to be a beggar.”

Van Stump winced—merely perceptibly—and with wonderful coolness laughed as if much amused at Marion’s earnestness. But he had had quite enough, and lest he might say something he would regret, or in some way show feeling that would arouse her suspicions, he deemed it wise to cut short the conversation, which he did by putting his name down on her paper for a liberal subscription.

“You are very generous,” said Marion, delighted at the amount he had given. “I thank you so much! Just think, I have more than two hundred and fifty dollars already! Isn’t it sweet of everybody to help me so willingly?”

A few more subscriptions were obtained before Marion returned home, and the sum then lacking to make up the three hundred dollars she herself subscribed.

“The world isn’t so large, after all,” muttered Van Stump, when Marion had left him. “Old Hammersly turned up at the Kingsleys’,” he went on, his brow darkening, “and of all things that that girl should take him into the house and listen to his woes and then come to me to help him—to me, of all men! There’s a fatality in it—upon my head, I believe there is. Well, may the money do the old beggar good! I can afford him this much as an item of interest—the principal he won’t be likely to get.”

XII

MRS. KINGSLEY dreaded the approaching interview between Marion and Derring-

forth. A year before Phil was a favorite with her, but now she felt differently. He had changed a good deal, it seemed to her, and for the worse.

She was partially right. Derringforth had changed, and especially toward her. He had never forgiven her for insisting upon the postponement of his engagement. She had forfeited all the admiration he had formerly felt for her. He did not seek to disguise his feelings. Coldness generally begets coldness, and it had done so in this case. There was cordial dislike between them—a lack of respect, even, on his part, for Mrs. Kingsley, as he saw her, had become the embodiment of vanity—a worshiper of the fetish of society.

Here was tangible cause for Derringforth’s feeling; she was less fortunate in that she could not formulate her objections to him on solid grounds. Feel toward him as she might, she must at least respect him. His sturdy character commanded this; but a woman needs less to build a case upon than a man requires. What she lacks in evidence is made up in indefinite little somethings, as shadowy oftentimes as the mist vanishing before the sun.

Marion was aware of the strained relations between her mother and Derringforth, but she had never until now realized the extent of the rupture.

“So you have canceled your engagement for Thursday evening with the Harburys!” said Mrs. Kingsley.

There was that in her manner and in the inflection of her voice that made plain her feeling.

“Yes,” replied Marion quietly. “It seemed to me that Phil had a better claim upon me.”

“And you coolly broke an engagement for that boy, and with the Harburys—of all people the Harburys!”

“Yes,” answered Marion, resenting the reference to Derringforth as “that boy.”

“You have made such a mistake!” sighed Mrs. Kingsley. “Such a mistake! The Harburys will never get over it, and they entertain so generously.”

“There are other things to think of besides entertainments,” returned Marion. “When Phil asked me to be his wife, you wanted the engagement postponed for a year. The year will be up on Thursday.”

“Did I say one year—only one year?” replied Mrs. Kingsley, an expression of alarm coming to her face.

"I think Phil would be justified in feeling that a year was meant—not more."

"Didn't I say 'a year at least'? I took particular note of what I said. No one would be warranted in construing that as limited to one year. I felt then, just as I feel now, that a girl should not be married before she is twenty-five. You know something of social life now, and are in a position to enjoy yourself. You have made a good impression, I know, and your second year in society should give you a good deal more pleasure than the first. Haven't you enjoyed it?"

"I have enjoyed it very much," answered Marion.

"I'm sure you have, and I can't imagine that you would wish to give up all the good times you can see ahead," continued Mrs. Kingsley, placing her arm affectionately around her daughter.

"I should like a few more months of such pleasure if it were not for disappointing Phil."

"But you would give up all these pleasures for him?"

"That would be right, wouldn't it?" said Marion, lifting her eyes so that they looked straight into her mother's.

"Do you think he would be as generous with you?" responded Mrs. Kingsley, evading the question.

"Yes, I believe he would. Phil would do anything for me."

"Suppose, then, you put him to the test, and ask him to wait a little longer. It would require much less sacrifice on his part than you would foolishly make for him. What has he done for your pleasure during the last year? Is it from him you have had the most attention? He couldn't even come from New York to see you this summer, while Burton Edwards came all the way from California. You cannot afford to be blind, Marion—blind!"

Mrs. Kingsley continued this line of argument for a time, and then took the matter up in a personal sense. She was careful not to say anything that would arouse Marion's antagonism, but, proceeding cautiously, she worked on her daughter's sympathy, gradually bringing to bear her own feeling against Derrington.

Marion was bewildered with conflicting emotions—the dread of disappointing Phil, on the one hand; on the other her duty to her mother, and the array of girl pleasures stretching out in dazzling attractiveness.

The following day the matter came up again, and now Mrs. Kingsley promised Marion a year abroad if she would refrain from binding herself to Derrington just then. This was a telling argument, for Marion had set her heart on revisiting Europe. Her mother enlarged upon the benefits and pleasures of such a trip.

"We could sail at the beginning of Lent," she said. "That's only a few weeks off now. Your father promised me last night that he would go if you would. He needs the change, and it would do us all a world of good."

In the midst of this discussion matters were complicated by the unexpected arrival of Burton Edwards. The young Californian came in with that breezy, inspiring way of his, flooding the room with sunshine. His was a nature that was as buoyant as the crisp autumn air, and all about him felt the stimulus of his presence.

"So glad to see you—a delightful surprise—how well you are looking—are you right from home?—why didn't you let us know you were coming?"

These and like utterances, a dozen or more, were flung at Edwards in quick succession by Marion and her mother. For a minute he was powerless to get in a word edgewise.

"Yes, right from home," he said, when a break in feminine enthusiasm came. "Couldn't stay away any longer. Jove, how good it looks to see you both once more!"

"And how good it seems to see you," was the answer in concert. "Come, sit here beside me," added Marion, her face beaming with pleasure, "and tell me all about yourself. How is every one at home?"

To Mrs. Kingsley the opportune coming of young Edwards was as the hand of rescue stretched forth from a realm impenetrable to human eyes. She saw in him an argument more effective with Marion than all the force of her own reasoning and pleading. This was the chief source of her delight, though she was genuinely glad of an opportunity to entertain him at her home, and at this season of the year when New York was at its best.

In this respect Marion's pleasure at his coming was no less than her mother's; but there was something beyond this. The impress that Burton Edwards had left upon her heart had not yet been effaced. His

sudden appearance thrilled her with the delicious sensation that he had at first inspired. It was as unlike the feeling she had toward Phil Derringforth as the smooth-flowing stream of deep and silent water is unlike the mountain torrent, leaping, tumbling, laughing, as it dashes from crag to crag. The one was a quiet, restful, rational emotion; the other was turbulent, stimulating, exhilarating.

The sentiment that bound her to Derringforth had begun with the beginning of intelligence. Its growth had been gradual, natural, healthful. Entering the heart thus, it had never caused her to experience the intoxication that comes from a sudden burst of passion. And what is there that so thrills the soul of a woman—so transports her to the acme of earthly delight—as the ardent love-making of a strong, chivalrous man, whose very nature throbs with impassioned sentiment? This is the sort of man that Marion met on that California ranch—the sort of man that had suddenly appeared before her at a moment when she was debating with herself whether to yield to her mother's appeal or to make Derringforth's heart glad.

"Phil has the better claim on me," she reasoned. "It wouldn't be right to disappoint him a second time, though, as mamma says, the postponement was not positively limited to one year. 'One year at least'—that isn't really one year. No, Phil couldn't claim that, and he wouldn't—I know he wouldn't. Phil would never charge me with bad faith without good cause; but I wonder—I half feel that he would have cause. I thought myself that a year was meant, but I can see mamma's way of looking at it. I remember her words. They were as she says; but then I talked to Phil as if I thought a year was meant, and really I did think so. Oh, dear, I don't know what to do! I cannot feel that I should disappoint mamma—she lives only for me. And then there is so much going on, and my engagements—such a lot of good times! I don't think I ought to be asked to lose them all. Phil might be a little reasonable. I wonder if he would really give up as much for me as I would have to give up for him! Mamma says I ought to put him to the test; but I don't need to do it. I know that Phil would do anything for me. I won't allow myself to think of him in any such way, poor fellow. I wish we had been engaged last year, be-

fore I ever tasted the pleasures of society! Then I wanted to marry him, and would have been content, but now—well, I want to marry him yet—of course I do, but—if it could only be postponed a little while longer, on mamma's account! I cannot get over her foolish prejudice against Phil, and he blames her—the idea, when she's doing so much to make me happy! Phil should think of that. Well, I suppose it will be all right some time—some time!"

She repeated the words with a sigh that expressed the depth of her perplexity.

XIII

THE current that had set so fiercely against the Derringforths could not be turned back by any ordinary means in the space of seven days. They had struggled with it month after month, and had barely kept their heads above water; but those last seven days meant more to young Derringforth than all the three hundred and odd in which he had been buffeted by the breakers.

He had kept up bravely throughout the year, his mind centered upon the day when the enforced postponement of his engagement to Marion would be over. It had been a bright beacon to him, cheering him in the darkest hours of the firm's distress. Viewing its approach while yet a great way off, there was abundant hope in his youthful heart that long before its coming he and his father would have reached smooth water.

With this conviction he counted the days as they passed, impatient at their slow tread. Would that long hoped for hour never come—that hour when all would be brightness and joy?

The weeks continued on in their measured way, until one day Derringforth found that only one remained. Then it was that he awoke in the agony of his soul, realizing that time, in its steady march, so slow to his impatient eyes, had outstripped him.

He was not ready. The hand of Shylock still held the house of Derringforth in its relentless grasp. How simple a thing it had seemed to him, with months to spare, to unloose and hurl forever from view the hated fingers of the money lender! Youth is ever thus hopeful. That "somehow," indefinite and vague, had been no less an illusion to him than to Marion. Until now he had never felt so keenly the torture of his position.

"Only seven days!" he said, and in the words, as he spoke them, there was the despair of hopelessness.

He lighted a cigar, put on his overcoat, and went out into the street. He had no definite object beyond seeking diversion of some kind—anything to take his thoughts from himself. It was nearly nine o'clock. He had been walking for perhaps fifteen minutes when he ran up the steps of the Kingsleys' house and pulled the bell.

He had passed by the house once before with the resolve not to call, but now he did call, and only to find that Marion had gone to the opera. He felt more dejected than ever, and yet in a way he was glad that he did not see Marion.

"What should I have said to her if I had seen her?" he asked himself. "She would have discovered that something is troubling me, and she must not know—not yet. I cannot make a home for her, and she shall not make one for me. It is I who shall have to request, this time, that the engagement be put off or—given up, I had almost said; but I won't say it—I can't—it shall not be!"

Derringforth pressed his hand to his throbbing head. He was walking rapidly down Fifth Avenue. The cold, crisp, wintry air and the invigorating exercise began to act as a tonic to his nerves. His pace quickened, and with the accelerated motion came additional activity of the brain.

"There still remain seven days," he said to himself finally. "Isn't it possible for us to free ourselves from that accursed Strum? Then I could go to Marion the happiest fellow in the world. If I could only do that!" he exclaimed.

The thought was to him as a spark of light flashed upon one groping in darkness. It gave him a thrill of hope. He turned it over and over in his mind. His face lost its despair. He was warming to the idea, and his soul burned with enthusiasm.

"I will do something worthy of the girl I love," he said to himself. His cheeks were flushed, and there was in his eyes the fire of determination. "I will have no more of this miserable drifting, like a helpless child," he went on, almost fiercely. "There is yet time for me to prove myself a man. I'll force the fight, and win or perish. This slow death is not the death for me. There is no courage, no bravery in it. I wonder men in these days ever win the love of women! Time was when

they dared anything for love, and they were right. The race has degenerated. I hate this helplessness—this waiting from day to day and from week to week for relief. Matters are all the while getting worse with us—our very lifeblood is being squeezed out by a Shylock. Better make one final effort and let the worst happen that can happen. Anything will be preferable to this hideous nightmare, this hovering over the verge of a precipice!"

This was the utterance of a mind intoxicated by a sudden hope, an outburst of desperation. It was either give up Marion and acknowledge to her the financial distress of his father and himself, or by some master stroke free themselves from the octopus that was dragging them to their doom.

An hour later Derringforth had returned home. The fire in the library grate burned low. Except for a little spot in the center, like a lighted window in a dark castle, there was no ruddy glow—nothing to cheer the eye. He drew up closer to the expiring embers and stretched his hands out over them to catch the little warmth that rose. His father and mother had gone to bed. He was alone.

The wind struck the windows and went whistling around the corner. Derringforth shivered, and walked across the room and looked at the thermometer. The temperature was fifty-seven.

"I thought it felt chilly," he said to himself, rubbing his hands together.

He went back to the fire, and, leaning forward over the grate, stirred the coals aimlessly with the poker. His mind had begun to react. The mental intoxication had spent itself. The castle was breaking up before his eyes. He watched it intently, and as one part after another fell away from the main structure, deep shadows settled upon his face.

The poker fell listlessly from his hand, but still he sat there, bent forward as before, his eyes not fixed upon the dying embers, but peering into space. His spirits had sunk to the lowest ebb. It was the rebound from the heights of a little while before. Marion had never seemed so far from him as at this instant. The thought of giving her up was torture to him.

A strange sensation came over him. It was not faintness, but something akin to it—something infinitely worse. He inhaled long breaths, but the pressure upon his

heart remained like a thousand-pound weight. In all the years he had known Marion, not once had she been so sweet to his eyes as now. He longed to go to her and clasp her in his arms and tell her of his love, and to talk of the home that had been their dream.

But even as he meditated thus a shadow arose before his vision, hiding the face of Marion. He started back with a shudder. It was the shadow of Strum. It had stolen in upon Derringforth like a thief in the stillness of the night, and there it stood, cringing before him in all its hideousness. He saw the sharp, cadaverous features, the thin, uncanny hands, the narrow, shrunken chest, and the uneven shoulders, one drooping far below the other.

Derringforth turned his eyes from the abhorrent sight, and, with an unconscious gesture of the hand, as if to bid the accursed shadow leave him, rose and walked back and forth in the room. The great clock in the corner struck the half hour. The hands were crawling on toward twelve. The wind still beat against the windows, and, baffled, shrieked madly as it sped away. He took his watch from his pocket and began winding it.

He was standing beside the library table. An evening paper lay upon it. His eyes fell listlessly upon the printed words, but he saw nothing. The winding of the watch continued mechanically. The end of the spring had been reached, and Derringforth was about to turn away, when suddenly his attention was fixed upon a single headline—"A Fortune Made in a Day."

He took up the paper and read the item eagerly. It was the story of a man who but a few months before was bankrupt. Wall Street was the scene of his dramatic triumph. A vivid account of his dealings was given in detail. Derringforth's heart beat fast as his eyes ran down the printed column. His breast began to heave with hope. His fingers twitched nervously, and when he had finished the story, he exclaimed, almost shouted, the words:

"This is the way out for me—*this is the way out!* What one man has done, another can do!"

He went to bed that night and into the land of dreams. He was in the arena. The clash of bull and bear in their mad struggle held him spellbound. The music of the exchange's thousand voices thrilled him.

As he slept, a smile hovered on his lips and the light of hope was in his face.

XIV

"HERE'S something I wish you would read, father," said Phil the following morning, and he held up a cutting from the evening newspaper.

Mr. Derringforth put on his glasses.

"Oh, yes, I saw that last night," he replied indifferently, and turned to his mail.

They were at their office. Phil felt a chill pass over him.

"Don't you think it wonderful that any one could recover so quickly from bankruptcy?" he ventured.

"Yes, rather wonderful," answered the father, running his eye over a long statement of account.

"Wall Street seems to be the place to make money. Did you read this list of names of men who have come up from nothing and are now worth millions?"

"Yes, I saw them. Twenty-three thousand dollars!" Mr. Derringforth went on, his brow knit. "It doesn't seem possible that it can be so much. Here, Phil, I wish you would run over these figures and see if the footing is correct."

Young Derringforth took the statement, but he was in no mood for addition. He was annoyed at his father's lack of interest. His brain was burning with the desire for speculation—for something more dramatic than the usual dig, dig, dig, with figures and correspondence. He ran halfway up one column, and forgot his count. He began again, and then stopped suddenly.

"Why didn't you go into Wall Street instead of this business?" he said, turning to his father.

"Why do you ask that question?" replied Mr. Derringforth, looking up quickly from his desk.

"I asked thinking that perhaps your name might have been among the millionaires in the list."

"These men are the exceptions. The chances are a hundred to one, and more, that I would have lost everything had I ventured into Wall Street. I have made many mistakes in my life, but never the mistake of dabbling in stock speculation."

"Don't you think this is a good year for exceptions?" asked Phil, ignoring the latter part of his father's remarks.

"Well, hardly, if you mean millionaire exceptions. What has got into your head,

Phil? Why are you so interested in Wall Street all of a sudden? I'm sure you can't think of going into speculation with the burden we already have on our shoulders."

"Isn't Wall Street the place to get rid of burdens such as we are carrying?"

"I hope you are not serious," replied Mr. Derrington, amazed.

"Yes, I am serious. The beauty of speculation is that one doesn't have to wait a lifetime to find out if he is rich or poor. While we have been struggling along here, a hundred fortunes have been made in the Street."

"And how many fortunes do you suppose have been lost there in the same time?"

"I don't know. Some men, of course, will lose money anywhere and in anything; but this is a pretty good list of successful operators."

"Yes, so it is, but as compared to the list of wrecks it would be as a foot rule to Bunker Hill monument."

"Isn't that putting it rather strong?" replied Phil incredulously.

"No, not a bit. The comparison is not a distortion of facts."

"Why isn't something said, then, of this Bunker Hill list?" asked Phil.

"You will find, as you grow older," said Mr. Derrington, "that people like to read of successes—not failures, unless there is something startling in them. The papers follow public taste. They do not try to form it. A man makes a fortune, and it is talked of forever. He is always prominent in the public eye, whereas his neighbor, whose business came to naught, is forgotten, and nothing is ever reprinted to keep the fact alive. It is well that it is so. The brighter the world is made the better. Let the gloom be forgotten; but do not be misled, Phil—do not think any more of Wall Street. It is no place for you. We are gaining ground, and in a few months more we shall be all right. I am not surprised that you have become uneasy. It has been a long, tedious pull, and you have worked like a veteran, with never a murmur. I have watched you, and your good work has been a reward to me for the siege I have been through."

"I have tried to do my best," replied Phil; "but it's pretty hard to drag along as we have been dragging, seeing every dollar that comes in swallowed up by that miserable shark. I can't endure the sight of

him much longer. I feel like choking the life out of the cringing cur!"

"You mustn't speak that way, Phil," his father cautioned him.

"I can't help it, and I don't know that I want to help it," answered Phil feverishly.

"What has come over you to produce this recklessness?"

"I'm simply desperate. I can't endure this drifting any longer. I feel like overturning everything, smashing everything. Last night, when I read the account of these men who had made fortunes in Wall Street in a day, I thought I saw a way out for us—a way to get out of Strum's grasp; and now you throw cold water on the whole thing! I don't want to seem unreasonable to you, father. I see that my words pain you, and I'm sorry, but, as I said before, I'm fairly desperate. You don't know what it all means to me. You can never know."

"It pains me, Phil—pains me very deeply—to see you in this mood," said Mr. Derrington, and he spoke in subdued tones, trying to hide the wound his son's words had made.

"Forgive me, father," said Phil. "I did not realize what I was saying. I am simply worn out, tortured beyond endurance."

"I am very sorry for you, my son," said the father tenderly. "I wish you had come to me before with your burdens. I knew something was troubling you, but you gave me no chance to speak to you about it. I think I understand you. It should have been plain to me before. The loss of my own property is nothing compared to my regret for you; but it may come out better than you think, Phil. Marion is a sensible girl, and will do as you wish. A few months more, and we shall be all right, I trust. Then you can go to her as you would go to her now, and all your hopes will be fulfilled. We must be patient a little while yet. Everything will come out right in the end."

XV

DERRINGTON plodded through the day, turning off in a perfunctory fashion the work that fell to his hands. There was no spontaneity in his movements, no sense of satisfaction over a task well done. His father's reassuring words had for a time warmed him to better feeling; but they meant so little, compared with his disappointment, that they were soon buried deep beneath the gloom that possessed him.

It was Saturday, and on the coming Thursday he was to go to Marion. What possible move yet remained? Why had he waited so long, he asked himself in bitterness of soul? The last chance of escape seemed closed to him.

After all, was his father right about Wall Street? Had he not done wrong in going to a Shylock for aid? Had he not seen relief just ahead throughout an entire year, and was it not as far off now as it had been at the beginning?

"I didn't believe in the first place in borrowing money at a ruinous rate," went on Phil. "I said so at the time. If we had stopped then, we should be all right now. We could have paid our debts long before this, and there would have been a fortune left. Now everything is tied up, and we are in the clutches of a robber. The profits of a year's work and the best of all our securities have gone to him, and still the hideous cry rings in our ears, more, more, more! Instead of getting out we are getting in deeper all the while, and yet father tries to persuade himself that we shall be all right in a few months. He is as likely to be mistaken about Wall Street as about his own business. I can understand his dread of a crash. I know his pride and sensitiveness. He has never met defeat, and he is trying to do the impossible, thinking that he will finally triumph; but we have been bled too much. If there were any really good foundation for believing that three or four months more would save us, I should feel more like going to Marion. She would wait patiently, I am sure, but there's no ground for hope. I will not mislead her as we have misled ourselves. It wouldn't be manly, it wouldn't be right. She wouldn't respect me, and I shouldn't respect myself."

In the evening Derrington strolled up to the Windsor Hotel, where Wall Street men were wont to congregate at the end of the day and discuss the why and the wherefore of things speculative. This custom is still kept up, and a lively market brings together many brokers, operators, and financiers. The atmosphere of the lobby is fraught with speculation, rumors, predictions, and forebodings dark and ominous.

Derrington had been in the hotel but a few minutes when a young man came up and spoke to him.

"Isn't this Phil Derrington?" he said, extending his hand.

"Yes, but you have the advantage of me. I cannot place you."

The other laughed.

"Surely you ought to remember an old schoolfellow."

"Burrock?" ventured Derrington.

"Right you are—the same, and I'm devilish glad to see you, old man! I've intended to look you up, but I've been so busy—you know how it is yourself."

"Have you been in town long?" asked Derrington, holding himself rather stiffly.

"Oh, yes—over two years. Lively town, this! One can't get around much to hunt up anybody, but I'm right glad to see you, old chap! Rich as ever, I s'pose?"

"I could stand a trifle more of prosperity without its turning my head."

"I should think so! Nothing would ever turn your head. I remember the way you used to do us up at school, and—I say, I haven't forgotten the time you came to my rescue, that night out on the Riggs road. Gee whiz, weren't those fellows going for me? I'd have been jelly in five minutes more. A great fight, wasn't it? I must do something for you, old man—a good turn deserves its reward. Can't I give you a pointer on the market? Everything is jumping, going up, up, up—never saw anything like it—made five thousand to-day myself. Excuse me a minute, there's a man I want to speak to," and he rushed away unceremoniously and hurried over to the new arrival with the air of one who had millions at stake.

Derrington walked to one side of the lobby and stood there almost like a statue, dumb with amazement. There was Burrock before his eyes, talking in the most enthusiastic, self-possessed, and impressive manner imaginable.

Presently a small man came in—small in stature, but evidently very great in the eyes of the Wall Street hosts. He was no other than Jay Gould. Derrington recognized him, and a minute or two later was astounded to see him speak to Burrock as he passed by.

"And this is that scrubby little Burrock!" Derrington mused, hardly believing his own eyes. "Hank Burrock, as the boys called him, *en rapport* with the kings of the Street—a devil-may-care fellow like him!"

Burrock had not enjoyed the good opinion of the students at the academy. His scholarly attributes were thin of fiber com-

pared with his assurance. Serious study and he were strangers. In his third year he was dropped for an act of grave misconduct; and now, apparently, he was a bigger man than any one in the school. Derrington could only wonder at what he saw. When Burrock introduced himself, he was disposed to hold the fellow at a distance, but now he began to feel a sudden interest in renewing the acquaintance.

"Made five thousand dollars to-day!" he repeated to himself. "Everything jumping, going up, up, up! If I could only make five thousand dollars, I could go to Marion happy as a king. Am I not as smart as Burrock—little Burrock, who never had a lesson? If he can make money in Wall Street, why shouldn't I?"

XVI

DERRINGTON did not derive much spiritual food from the preached word the following morning. Around and about him were a dozen sleek, self-satisfied-looking millionaires whose money had been made in Wall Street. Derrington felt a trifle envious. Why should these men have so much and he be in such sore distress?

But this thought soon gave place to quickening ambition. He forgot his surroundings, forgot that he was in the house of God, and heeded not the admonitions that fell from the preacher's lips. His mind was in Wall Street. He was constructing schemes for speculation and figuring out his profits.

As his gains accumulated, his mind warmed to the theme. The machinery of his brain moved faster and yet faster. His plans grew apace, until finally he saw himself, at the end of a few months, among the most active operators of the exchange.

Burrock, the boy whom, at school, he had regarded as an undesirable acquaintance, had suddenly grown to larger stature. Then his clothes fitted badly, and he was generally a fellow of the second order; but now he was a power. He had been in Wall Street two years, and lived like a Croesus—had bachelor apartments, lavishly furnished, drove a spanking tandem, and spent money right and left.

Burrock was a bull of the fiercest type. The market was with him, and he saw millions in the air. His enthusiasm was infectious. Derrington had spent an hour with him the night before in his luxurious rooms, and had caught the infection.

It is not surprising that the words of the pulpit did not reach Derrington's mind. He was not in a receptive mood for Bible truths, or for anything, in fact, that did not vibrate with a dramatic thrill.

In the evening he called on Marion. He had not intended to do this. She did not expect him. His soul was on so lofty a plane that he hesitated at nothing. There was no reason why he should not spend an hour or two with her. In fact, it was the natural thing for him to do. He had been in an unnatural mood. He had seemed to fight shy of her. She was too proud to coax him to call, and he had remained away—with a heartache.

Marion was in the parlor with Burton Edwards when Derrington entered the room.

"I am glad to see you," she said, extending her hand cordially, and introduced him to her guest.

Derrington was at his best—chatty, genial, and entertaining. Brought face to face with Burton Edwards, he seemed the superior man. Marion noted this, and in the depths of her heart she was glad. She had wondered if he would not suffer by personal comparison, but the test had been made, and with the odds on his side.

She listened to his conversation in amazement. He had never been so delightfully clever before, and from the sincerity of her soul she blessed him for drawing attention from herself. Her position was painfully awkward. She was paying the penalty of concealing what she ought to have told. Derrington knew nothing of Edwards, and Edwards knew nothing of Derrington. She had not mentioned either to the other; but here they were face to face, and each seemed to be on the most intimate terms with her.

"Marion completely captured our hearts while she was on the ranch," remarked Edwards, in the course of conversation.

"You mustn't believe him, Phil," said Marion, her cheeks burning; and turning to Edwards she added, with a pretty little gesture of protest: "You are so extravagant in your praise, Burton!"

"Who is this fellow that presumes to call her 'Marion' and whom she calls 'Burton'?" said Derrington to himself, paling as if pierced by an arrow.

"Who is this fellow that Marion calls 'Phil' with such familiarity?" thought Edwards, the fire darting from his eyes.

It would have required a far cooler head than Marion Kingsley's to withstand without embarrassment the look that each of the young men gave her. She was conscious of the blush that proclaimed her discomfort. The struggle to appear natural was unavailing. Her self-possession deserted her.

Had she been thirty instead of twenty, and well skilled in the ways of the world, schooled by the experience that hardens, she would have found less difficulty in maintaining an unruffled front; but her life had been singularly free from deception, beyond her double dealing—as she now regarded it—with the two men before her. The thought flashed across her in all its ugliness. She felt like flying from the room to escape from them—to escape from herself, if possible.

It seemed to her that the silence of an instant had lengthened into an hour. Would no one ever speak—say something, anything, that would draw attention from her?

In desperation she raised her eyes to Derrington in mute appeal. His face was white as death. He had never before known the torture of jealousy, but that one word "Burton" from her lips, in connection with what he saw and heard, was enough. No dagger thrust could have been sharper or more sudden.

But he had not the heart to let her suffer. He saw her embarrassment, and understood her. The thought that she had been deceiving him—that she was in love with Edwards—even this was not enough to steel his heart against her. When her eyes reached his with a look that seemed to cry for help, he felt that she had turned to him, not to Edwards, and a deeper sense of love than he had ever felt before went out to her. With masterful control over himself he said:

"Pardon me for my absent-mindedness. I met an old schoolfellow last night—the oddest specimen in the world—and he keeps coming into my thoughts. It's a strange confession to make, I know, but it will account for my being dumb. I'll promise to do better from now on, Marion, so don't look at me as if I were an enigma. That fellow Burrock is the cause of my inanity. He was the last boy in school that promised to amount to anything, and now here he is in New York cutting a wide swath, making heaps of money—five thousand

dollars only yesterday—and living like a king. I wish you could all see him as I remember him, and contrast his appearance as a boy with the dash and style he carries now."

The silence was effectually broken, and Derrington made it seem that he was responsible for it all. What he had said of Burrock quickened the curiosity of Edwards, and Derrington told, with spirit, many amusing incidents of the youthful Napoleon of finance.

Marion almost forgot her own discomfort in admiration of Phil. His generosity, at a time when she felt he must hate her for her duplicity, idealized him in her eyes. She noticed the quaver in his voice when he first broke the silence, and understood its meaning. Her heart ached for the pain she had caused him.

Edwards had less cause to feel jealous than Derrington. He had no claim on Marion. She had never given him to understand that she cared for him with any feeling more warm than friendship. It was not necessary for her to do so. His love for her needed no such quickening. In the summer, at her country home, she had entertained him delightfully, but had cleverly kept him from saying the thing that filled his heart, even as she had on the day of their last ride together at the end of her visit to the ranch, now nearly a year ago.

He had often puzzled his brain to divine her purpose in keeping him at a distance, while seemingly enjoying his presence. There was every reason to believe that she liked to have him with her, but beyond a certain line he could make no advance. The thought had sometimes occurred to him that perhaps she loved another, and yet he saw no evidence of this. She was usually surrounded by a dozen admirers, no one of whom seemed to be favored so much as himself.

This in a way was gratifying, but it was also disappointing. Burton's summer visit had only served to increase his passion for her, without bringing him the assurance his heart craved. Sometimes he fancied that by an act or a look she betrayed love for him, and his soul glowed with happiness. Why she should be so strictly on guard was a mystery, since there was no one else to whom she seemed devoted; but whenever he approached the subject of his love for her she always managed to turn him from it. She seemed to understand him

perfectly, while he could not divine her motives. He felt annoyed with himself at his repeated failures. He could not well be vexed at her. She was always charmingly agreeable, and seemed utterly unconscious of his purpose.

The summer visit had finally ended. He left her more deeply in love than ever, promising to visit her again in the winter. She had baffled every attempt to tell her what he had come three thousand miles to say—what he had resolved he would say, even if it had to be said abruptly.

Now, after the lapse of a few months, he had come to the East again with a like resolve. Continents are nothing for love to traverse. It knows no distance, no obstacles—the sort of love that burned in the breast of Burton Edwards. Marion's evident delight at his coming made him very happy, and his happiness had grown until Derringforth's sudden appearance.

There was something in the greeting she gave Phil very different from her manner toward the young men whose attention was so assiduous to her during the summer. Edwards felt an odd sensation come over him at the first sight of Derringforth—a sort of premonition that this stranger stood between Marion and himself.

It is not an easy matter for a man with the heartache to talk as Phil talked, rising above his feelings, and giving a zest to the conversation for the remainder of the evening. He felt a satisfaction in restoring serenity, and was in a way gratified at his success in making it seem that he alone was responsible for the embarrassing pause in the conversation.

Happiness always follows a generous act; but Derringforth's happiness was comparative merely, not actual. He was glad to get away and be by himself, where he could think; and yet it was with the utmost reluctance that he tore himself from Marion, leaving her with a man who loved her—whom perhaps she loved. The sensation of jealousy rankled in his soul, but the thought that Marion had turned to him in her distress was a source of comfort.

He loved her now as it had never seemed to him he could love, and more than ever he felt the torture of the poverty that would compel him to ask that their engagement should be postponed. What might not be the result of a postponement with a rival in the field, and such a rival as Burton Edwards?

"If I had only gone to California with her!" he thought. "Perhaps she never would have met him. It would have been different, anyway, if I had been with her; but I couldn't go. A Shylock had me by the throat. I should have told Marion; then she would have understood me. This concealing things from one who has a right to know always makes trouble. It has made trouble for Marion as well as myself. She ought to have told me about Edwards. She always used to tell me everything. Perhaps I am to blame. I haven't told her anything about our trouble, and I didn't even go to see her all last summer. It was plain enough to me why I didn't go, but I begin to understand that it wasn't plain to her. I know now how it hurts me to realize that the one I love has concealed something from me. Marion may have felt as I feel, and a girl has reason to notice such things more than a man."

XVII

DERRINGFORTH spent a sleepless night, and on Monday morning went to the office in bad temper. There was no sunshine anywhere. He was half sick and in a more fretful mood than ever before in his life.

To make matters worse, his father was called over to Philadelphia. This compelled Derringforth to remain at the office and dig into figures with a splitting headache and a worse heartache. It cut him out of another day, and there were only three remaining. Even with Burrock's help he could accomplish little in so short a time.

"Four days," he reflected, "would give me a better show, and I promised to meet Burrock and lunch with him at one, but now father is away. Everything is working against me!"

At this point his train of thought was interrupted by the appearance of Strum.

"Good morning," said the latter, bowing very low in a beggarly way. "I hope I am not intruding."

"I can see you if it is necessary," answered Derringforth shortly.

"Thank you," returned Strum obsequiously. "It is desirable that I should see you. In fact, my client instructed me to come to you several days ago, but I have hesitated, knowing that—er—believing that you would send for me when—er—when ever it was convenient for you to see me. My client—you know how impatient some men are, Mr. Derringforth."

He stroked his thin, bony chin with his yet thinner hand as he spoke, and his cringing, crawling, apologetic manner sent a chill through Derrington. There was a pause.

"I had expected to see your father," continued Strum; "but—you are a member of the firm, I believe. Am I not right—you are a member of the firm?"

"I am," answered Derrington curtly; "but perhaps you'd better wait to see father."

"Will he be in soon?"

"He is out of town."

"Out of town?" repeated Strum, raising his eyebrows in feigned surprise.

"Yes."

"It is unfortunate. I should have come before; my client will blame me," said Strum, speaking very low, as if talking to himself.

Phil took up a letter and began reading it. Strum stood by, apparently in deep thought. Derrington did not take in the meaning of the letter. His contempt for Strum was getting the mastery of him. He took up his pen and wrote a note to Burrock, saying that he would not be able to lunch with him. He called the office boy and sent him out with the note. Strum still stood by meekly waiting Derrington's pleasure.

The telephone bell rang. Phil answered it. He returned to his desk and went through the motions of writing. His nerves had been unstrung by the strain upon them during the previous evening, and by a sleepless night. He felt that he could not endure Strum's presence much longer.

"If he would only say something," he thought, "curse me to my face, even, it would be a relief. Then I could throttle the miserable cur!"

The silence had become unbearable when at length Strum spoke.

"I fear I am trespassing on your time," he said apologetically. "Shall I wait outside until you are more at leisure?"

"If you have any business with me, the sooner it is over the better," answered Derrington almost fiercely.

Strum moved back a step, and, if possible, assumed a more obsequious manner than ever.

"It is about the collateral I have come—the collateral your father offered me."

"Well?" said Derrington.

"The securities are not satisfactory to my client. I think myself that they are

good, perfectly good; but, as his attorney, what can I do? I have urged leniency, but I am sorry to say he is firm—very firm, sir. I have done my best in your interest. I hope you will look upon it in this light, sir—in this light."

"Go on!" said Derrington.

"I was about to say—I had started to say—that the securities for the proposed renewal of the twenty-thousand-dollar loan are not satisfactory to my client. He says he must have the money. I have urged him to reconsider, but, as I have already said, he is firm—very firm, sir. I am not without hope—no, not yet without hope. If you could go over your affairs with me—could give me the assurance of improvement, and could strengthen these securities in some way—by the addition of others, perhaps, or an indorsed note, or maybe a mortgage—your home is clear, I believe—no lien on it. I understood your father to say there was not."

"If my father told you so, sir, you would do well not to question his word," replied Derrington, boiling with indignation.

"I am sure you are right. I am very sorry you should impute to me motives that I would not harbor—not for a minute. I knew how it would be, and told my client, but he would not listen to me. He instructed me to investigate your affairs."

"Well, you can't investigate our affairs, and you may tell your client so," said Derrington decisively. "And furthermore," he went on, "you may say from me that he's got about all the blood out of this house that he'll get!"

This utterance frightened Strum, who feared that the Derringtons were on the verge of collapse. The absence of the senior partner strengthened his suspicion. He had come to the son to pry into affairs, having learned that the father had gone out of town; and now, after hearing these reckless words from the young man, he was determined to make good his errand.

"I am sorry you feel annoyed. I was afraid you would, but I am sure you can't blame me," he began. "I must act for my client, and he has advanced large sums of money, and money is very tight, you know—very tight. Of course, one wants to feel safe. My client has relied upon me largely, but now he wants additional facts. He must have them, or the renewal, I fear, will not be made. Mind you, he says it will not be made, but I am working in your in-

terest—in your interest, sir. Your father asked me to get the loan renewed. The note falls due to-morrow. I suppose your father thinks the matter has been arranged, but I regret to say, I am very sorry to say, it has not. In view of these facts, regarding your father's wishes, I am sure you will not be hasty. A moment's reflection will show you that I am working in your interest—in your father's interest. My client is a stubborn man—a very stubborn man. I would not dare tell him what you have said. He would be unyielding—unmerciful, even; but, handled right, he is kind-hearted. I am sure he can be brought to see that it is for the interest of all that the renewal of the loan should be granted. I will undertake to guarantee that myself, if the statement he asks for can be had—not a formal statement—just a knowledge of things, that is all I need, so that I can assure him everything is all right. He relies on me, you see, very largely.”

“Then, if he relies on you, what more do you want?” said Derrington. “You say you are satisfied. Your stories don't hang together. I understand you through and through. You are a cowardly sneak, trying to pry into our affairs, and placing all the responsibility on some one else. I have seen enough of you, and detest you. You can do your worst—I don't care!”

“But your father,” insinuated Strum. “You would not want to see him humiliated by a crash. He is in the power of my client, you know—you are in the power of my client. You would do well not to make a mistake, Mr. Derrington!”

Strum was a trifle whiter than usual, but beyond this showed no feeling at Derrington's denunciation. He was there for a purpose, and his blood was too cold to be inflamed into anger.

His very coolness exasperated the younger man.

“I don't ask your advice,” said Phil defiantly. “Let the worst happen that can happen—anything will be preferable to being bullied and bled by a pair of cringing, contemptible Shylocks like you and your client, whoever he may be!”

Even this did not warm Strum. He had no sense of dignity—no feeling. Words could not penetrate his thick skin. His cringing manner and utter disregard of abuse maddened Derrington. Strum continued his effort, snakelike and cunning, to worm out the information he sought, till

at length Derrington, exasperated to the last degree, made a dash for him, and, catching him by the nape of the neck and the slack of his trousers, threw him headlong from the office.

“Never show your miserable face in here again, you beggarly parasite!” he said, as Strum turned a couple of somersaults and doubled up in a heap.

XVIII

“I'm glad I did it,” said Derrington to himself, later in the day, when his temper had cooled down. “It's done and over with. It had to be done sooner or later. The conviction has been growing on me that I couldn't keep my hands off him much longer. I felt it in my bones. A man can stand only so much and no more. I feel better, come what will. It's a good thing to give a cur his deserts. I don't know what father will say. It's done, anyway, and can't be undone.”

The subject thus dismissed, Derrington settled down to steady, rapid work, and turned off correspondence and manipulated figures in a way that would have made a veteran accountant envious. There was no trace now of the blues of the morning—no headache, no heartache. He was keyed up to too high a point.

In the evening he called at Burrock's apartment.

“I've done a heap of thinking since I saw you,” said Derrington.

“Good!” returned Burrock in his off-hand way. “What are your conclusions?”

“In a word, that I want to make some money.”

“Natural—why don't you?”

“But how?”

“I only know one way—no doubt you know another.”

“You mean Wall Street?”

“Sure.”

“And you think I have made a lot of money with my father?”

“Everybody thinks so. Haven't you?”

“No. This is confidential.”

“Certainly—go on.”

“There isn't much to say, only that we have had a hard year.”

“And are short of money?”

“Yes.”

“I know how it is myself—devilish uncomfortable—been broke myself twice—high and dry, fairly on my uppers.”

“And now you are on the top wave?”

"Yes, things are going my way now."

"And all this has happened inside of two years?"

"Yes—no place like Wall Street to get up and get down. Makes a man's head whiz sometimes, but it's life—nothing like it—just suits me—some go to it—always dramatic—no stagnation. Why don't you try it?"

"That's the very thing I want to talk to you about."

"I'm your huckleberry—glad to do anything for you, Derrington— you're my kind. By the way, can't you go out for a spin with me to-morrow afternoon?—say four o'clock—sleighting is fine."

"I'll try," replied Derrington, his wonder increasing the more he saw of Burrock. "But what interests me most," he continued, "is Wall Street. I must make some money. I'm not on my uppers, but in a way I'm worse off. It's a crisis in my life. Burrock, I'll make a confidant of you. I'm in love. I shall lose the sweetest girl in the world. I'm half crazy—been tortured to death by a Shylock."

"You interest me. I know how you feel—I've already lost the sweetest girl in the world."

"I'm sorry for you, indeed I am," said Derrington, and there was deep sympathy in his voice.

"Well, it's all over—can't be helped—broke me up for a time—men have a way of surviving, but it hurts. What can I do for you? Perhaps I can save you."

"I don't know what you can do. I want to do for myself. Maybe you can start me right, but I'm afraid you can't. I have no money to start with. I couldn't draw it from the firm. Father doesn't believe in speculation. I don't like to go against his wishes, but he may be wrong."

"I understand. Men are wrong sometimes, and why not fathers as well as others?"

"I have thought of that myself, and then—well, it's so urgent. If it were not for this pinch I should be engaged in three days more—just think, Burrock, only three days, and the girl of all others in the world! I'll tell you about her some time—not now. We may see her to-morrow if I go sleighting with you, and you'll agree with me. What can I do?"

"I understand—you either become engaged or miss your chance."

"I'm afraid so," faltered Derrington.

"And your father can't do anything for you?"

"No, I wouldn't allow him to, with the load he's carrying. The fact is we are being bled to death. Some bold move must be made to get out of the clutches of a robber."

"A good idea! I like your thought. Of course I know how you feel about speculating against your father's wishes. I don't want to be held responsible, but if you don't draw on the firm for money, and attend to business, doing the usual work you have to do, I can't see wherein you would do anything very dreadful to take a flyer in the market now and again."

"That's the way it seems to me, but the how of the thing—"

"I understand—'tis tough, starting without anything, but I've done it twice. It can be done, and it feels good, devilish good, to pull yourself up by your boot straps, as it were."

"I should think it would. I should like to try the experiment."

"It's a great act, but you can do it—I'll help you. Let's see, what shall it be? St. Paul preferred, strikes me, is a sure thing for a couple of points advance—had a tip on it to-night. Yes, old man, I think we'll call it a go on St. Paul preferred. How much shall I buy for you?"

"Now you have me," answered Derrington. "In the present state of my finances I think one share would be taking great chances."

"But I'm going to help you. S'pose we call it a hundred shares? I'm going to buy a thousand for myself. You can't lose much on a deal of this size. I'll put a stop order on your purchase, so that the stock will be sold at a decline of one point. That makes you safe."

"How much would I lose?"

"Hundred dollars and brokerage—that's all. I'll trust you for that, and if you get knocked down the first time I'll trust you for a second flyer."

"You are too kind, Burrock! I ought not to allow you to take chances on me."

"Nonsense—you're good for a hundred—if you're not, I better find it out—I can't waste my time on a fellow that's not good for that much."

"I don't think I should allow a debt of that size to go unpaid. A hundred dollars isn't much for a man to earn at day labor."

"No, not when he doesn't have to earn

it by day labor. When he does, it's another thing—I know what work is—don't I? Gee whiz, if you'd only followed me on the farm—but I know when I've done enough—I know what suits me. You'll be daft on speculation—nothing like it to make a fellow's blood jump. You'll make a couple of hundred on to-morrow's flyer, mark my words. Just for luck I'll bet you a box of cigars. Go me?"

XIX

TUESDAY opened big with possibilities for Derringforth. It would bring his first venture into Wall Street, and a probable crash in the firm's affairs. Moreover, he must tell his father of the unceremonious method he had employed in getting rid of Strum.

All in all, it was no ordinary morning. So many things were crowding in upon his mind that even Marion was forgotten for a time.

Shortly after the market opened he received a note from Burrock, saying:

Bought your stock, St. Paul preferred, sixty-eight and a quarter—a great purchase—advanced an eighth already—it will go to seventy to-day—maybe more—the girl will be yours yet!

Derringforth's heart bounded.

"This is something like it," he said, with difficulty restraining his enthusiasm. "I only wish there was more time! I should have struck out for myself before, but perhaps it isn't too late. If I have good luck now, I can go in heavier next time. Burrock buys a thousand shares—two points advance would give him two thousand dollars against my two hundred, and all made in the same time. I wish I had taken more—gone up an eighth already. Two thousand dollars! If I could only make as much, I'd take the chances and not ask Marion to wait. Two thousand—that would give me a good capital to work on."

"Well, Phil, how is everything? Averted a crash while I have been gone?" said Mr. Derringforth, coming into the office with a brisk step. "Couldn't get away last night—didn't fix up the deal with Braddocks until after midnight."

"Then you got the money?" said Phil eagerly.

"Yes, have a certified check in my pocket."

"Good! We are saved. I'm glad it turned out as it did."

"Glad what turned out—what are you talking about?"

"Strum. He came here yesterday, and, finding you were away, began in his sneaking fashion to pry into our affairs—said his client wouldn't take the security you offered him—wanted a mortgage or something equally good. I began to get hot. I couldn't bear his impudence, and finally, when he said he had you in his power, and talked of a crash and all that, I picked him up and threw him out of the office."

"Phil, I'm proud of you!" said Mr. Derringforth. "I've wanted to throw the miserable parasite out myself a dozen times. I'm glad you did it, now that it's over. Let a crash come if it wants to!"

"You have relieved my anxiety," replied Phil. "I was afraid you would blame me, but I couldn't help it. Any one with spirit would have done as I did, I think."

"You did just right. I don't regret it in the least, and I doubt if it does any harm. Fortunately we can meet the payment that comes due to-day, and we'll not worry about the others—not just now."

It was a rare thing for Derringforth to get away from the office before the close of business hours, but to-day he took a little time off. Burrock had out his pair of blacks, with a showy sleigh and handsome bear robes. The air was crisp and keen, the sun was bright, and the sleighing excellent. The horses were alive to the sport, and flew over the frozen snow at an exhilarating pace.

"This is great fun," said Burrock, hanging on to the lines. "Gives a man new life—nothing like a sleigh ride, after all—glad you could come with me—Jove, don't these horses pull? Never saw them feel so well."

"I'm glad to be with you, you may be sure," replied Derringforth. "This is a great treat for me—first sleigh ride I've had this year."

The East Drive of Central Park was brilliant with showy turnouts and gay with handsome women. The wealth of the metropolis was out in force, enjoying to the utmost the brief season of winter pleasure. Burrock and Derringforth were in the best of spirits, and chatted in light vein as they sped along, now admiring a pretty face, a pair of prancing horses, or a novel sleigh, and again criticizing and commenting with the freedom of young New Yorkers.

They drove up as far as Macomb's Dam Bridge, and turned back toward the Park.

In those days Seventh Avenue from One Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street to One Hundred and Tenth was used as a speedway. Burrock had given the blacks the reins, and they were skimming over the frozen snow at a pace that seemed almost like flying. The jingle of bells and the array of bright faces were inspiring. Every one looked happy. The sidewalks were lined with people who had come out to watch the brilliant scene on the avenue.

Several racers were a little way ahead, each struggling for the lead. Burrock had his eye on them, and sent the blacks in hot pursuit. They understood him, and, laying back their ears, sprang forward. In scarcely the space of a breath Burrock and Derringforth were among the racers. Over the smooth snow the horses flew on and on in their mad rush till the blacks were in the lead.

Derringforth felt the blood dance in his veins. Burrock was white, but in his face there was the look of proud triumph. The thunder of hoofs was still just behind. The glory of victory was not yet secure. Almost before he knew it the great, gaunt, angular form of a pacer stole up beside him. That insidious amble that breaks the heart of an honest horse was every instant sending the awkward, ugly beast nearer to the front.

The blacks heard him coming, and shot forward at a tremendous gait. Burrock steadied them with the lines, and urged them to greater speed. Every tick of the watch sent them faster and yet faster.

All eyes were turned upon the racers. It was neck and neck, hoof and hoof, till at length the endurance of the pacer began to fail. The blacks, white with foam, seemed to gain momentum as they dashed onward, and soon the road was theirs again—the pacer was a length behind.

Derringforth took a long breath. Burrock was even whiter than before.

"Glorious!" exclaimed Derringforth, so much excited that his voice was scarcely audible.

"Great!" ejaculated Burrock, almost jerking out the word as he pulled on the lines with all his strength.

On the other side of the street a string of gay turnouts was bounding northward. Derringforth's nerves thrilled with excitement and delight.

"It's worth a thousand dollars," he said. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

"I didn't know it was in them—whoa, Tom; whoa, Jerry—they've left everything behind!"

"Yes, everything ever—"

The sentence was never finished. An instant before, Derringforth had caught sight of a showy pair of high-stepping horses, with a handsome Russian sleigh, and now he saw something that fairly froze the blood in his veins. It was Marion in the act of calling Burton Edwards's attention to the fiery blacks.

Edwards was on the inside of the sleigh, with his head turned toward hers. With a sudden impulse she took her hand from her muff and placed it on his arm, saying:

"Oh, Burton, see, see!"

She was gone in an instant, and every breath widened the gap between her and Derringforth. He turned to look after her. Burton Edwards was again gazing into her eyes, with his head bent toward hers as before.

XX

If the fires of Hades burn with a flame as fierce as the fires of jealousy, God will never allow man, His own creation, to suffer an endless torture so merciless and cruel.

Derringforth no longer found any comfort in the fact that Marion had turned to him for help instead of to Burton Edwards. This very act now began to loom up as evidence against her. He saw in it a trick to deceive him.

The thought of deception in connection with Marion was one that had never till now entered his heart. It hurt him almost as much as the torture of jealousy. He lived over again that Sunday evening, and saw with different eyes every look and gesture of Marion's—heard anew every utterance from her lips. There could be but one interpretation of it all. Marion was in love with Burton Edwards; Marion had sought to deceive him.

His brain reeled with agony and despair. There was no longer any hope. He had nothing to live for. The very substance of life was dissolving. With Marion false to him, what remained that he could cling to—what was there to sustain him?

The moan of his own heart frightened him. How strange and awful the sound! He groped about as one in darkness, almost feeling his way. He dare not trust his eyes, his ears—everything was weird, strange, horrible. He shrank even from himself—

from the dead, cold soul within him—hopeless, wretched.

The next morning among Derrington's mail was a letter from Marion. One glance at the superscription was enough to send the blood coursing through his veins. He tore open the envelope eagerly, almost fiercely. He drew out the letter, and suddenly shrank from reading it. A fearful thought shot through his mind—the thought that Marion had engaged herself to his rival.

He crushed the note in his trembling hand, and walked back and forth in pitiable agony. The fact itself could have been no more painful. His imagination had given reality and substance to the thing he dreaded.

For a few moments everything became blank. The room whirled around him. He seized a chair as it flew past and threw himself into it. He put his hand to his head and tried to steady it—tried to stop the throbbing of his brain; and there he sat, pale, almost ghastly, hopeless, heartless, and in despair.

Finally he was roused by the butler, who came up to say that breakfast was awaiting him. He staggered to his feet, dropping the letter listlessly upon the table. A glance at his white face in the mirror frightened him. He had never seen himself look so ill. He felt his pulse. He could scarcely detect it.

He was upon the point of throwing himself upon the bed with the conviction that he was actually ill, when the thought of Wall Street came into his mind. There was his speculation, and Burrock had invited him to luncheon. No, he could not give up. He must try to show some life—try to get some blood into his cheeks.

He went to the washstand, splashed his face with cold water, and rubbed it vigorously with a coarse towel. He stepped back to the mirror. The artificial glow had taken ten years off him, but it had not removed the ache from his heart or stilled the tremble of his hands. He put on his coat, took up Marion's letter, and, putting it in his pocket, started to leave the room.

He had taken perhaps three steps when he stopped. His hand stole into his pocket. The letter came forth. It ran thus:

DEAR PHIL:

I have been trying to write you ever since Sunday night, but with a guest to entertain I have

hardly had a minute to myself. I have wanted to tell you how much I appreciated your kindness. You were perfectly lovely, and you are the dearest boy in the world. You must think very badly of me, Phil, for not telling you about Burton Edwards. I could read your thoughts. It was, oh, so embarrassing to me! I felt like a culprit.

I want to tell you all about it. We have drifted a little away from each other, Phil. I have not felt free to talk to you the way I used to. I shall never forget how generous you were in coming to my relief as you did on Sunday evening—taking all the blame upon yourself. I didn't know that even you could be so unselfish, and you did it so cleverly as to almost mislead me.

It is midnight. Every one else has gone to bed. I have taken this time to write to you to thank you as I have thanked you in my heart a thousand times, and I want to write about something else, too. I hardly know how to begin it. I don't want you to misunderstand me, and I am afraid you will.

It is about your coming to me on Thursday evening I want to speak. When I wrote you that I would reserve the evening for you, I knew nothing of this visit from Burton Edwards. What I want to ask you is this—would it not be better for us both if you would postpone coming until he has gone? It will only be a matter of ten days or so now. It would be so awkward for me to seclude myself from him for an entire evening, and I want the entire evening with you, as I promised you. You won't misunderstand me, will you, Phil? I know you won't. Write me and say that it is all right.

I wish you could have been with us this afternoon. I had the most delightful sleigh ride—Mr. Edwards took me out. It was such perfect sleighing, and such a brilliant scene—every one, it seemed to me, was out enjoying the sport except you, and you, poor boy, I suppose, were as hard at work as ever. You are making a perfect slave of yourself. I wish I could ask you to come to see me to-morrow evening, but we all go to the theater.

As ever,

MARION.

TUESDAY, midnight.

There was a sudden rebound in Derrington's spirits. The artificial glow of his face was amply sustained now by the quickened action of his pulse. He straightened himself up, and threw out his chest. The sickening sensation was gone. He was a man once more, and all the love of his heart was alive again.

There were two thoughts that flashed upon his mind as he read Marion's letter, and only two. The one was that she still loved him; the other, that the additional ten days would give him time to go further into speculation and make the money that he so much desired. There seemed to be something almost providential in the visit of Burton Edwards.

"I wonder if God does bring these things

about!" he meditated. "Sometimes it seems as if He did. He must despise me for being so foolish this morning. I am ashamed of myself, but the thought that Marion had turned from me was so real, and so cruel, that I couldn't help it. I suppose God has some purpose in working in His mysterious ways, but I don't see why it wouldn't have been just as well to make a short cut of it. If He had kept us out of a Shylock's clutches, then I should have had plenty of money. It's all very puzzling when I stop to think about it. If I hadn't gone to the academy, I shouldn't have met Burrock, and then it was by the merest chance that I ran against him here in the city; and, strange to say, he seemed glad to help me. It looks as if between him and Edwards I may come out all right after all—that is, I have a chance to, and if that is what God really means, I shall, of course; but perhaps it isn't, and perhaps God isn't doing anything about it. It may be all chance. If it is—but I can't think it is. It seems as if there were something more than chance when I look back over the strange things that have happened even in my short life."

These views of Derringforth's were rather vague, but they served to give him some satisfaction, and the pangs of jealousy were allayed for a time. He wrote Marion a cordial, reassuring note, saying that she had done just right in suggesting a postponement—that he understood her fully, and appreciated the position she was in, with a guest to entertain.

"Ten days, or even more, will make no difference," he said. "We are not likely to change much in so short a time."

But Derringforth was not quite so sure of this a little later on. He was not so confident that he could see God's hand in sending Edwards into Marion's home. He was not altogether satisfied that he had written the best letter to Marion that could have been written. He even had some doubt about an overruling power having had anything to do with bringing him and Burrock together.

A second reading of Marion's letter had produced this change in him. It was not quite so reassuring as he had at first thought. There was no evidence that she did not care deeply for Edwards. In fact, she had spoken of the delightful sleigh ride she had had with him.

This brought back the scene vividly to

Derringforth's mind. He recalled the look of love in Burton's face as he gazed into Marion's eyes. There was a reawakening of the old jealousy, and that always gives a different shading to everything. What if Marion had sought this additional time for her own convenience? Might it not be possible?

"I wish I hadn't consented to the postponement," he sighed. "It may be all right, but I don't like the look of things. I don't like to think of that fellow in the same house with her, and they are, together all the time—going to the theater to-night. Why didn't Marion ask me to go with them? Well, as I said, it may be all right, but—I don't know; I've thought so much and worried so much and tried so hard to make money that I can't think straight any more. One time I think one thing and then again something else, but I don't know that that sort of thing is peculiar to myself. I fancy that other people look at things with varying moods pretty much as I do. If not, then there's something wrong with me. Well, I've agreed to wait at least ten days, and I'll do it without murmuring any more; and in the meantime I'll see what I can do in Wall Street."

XXI

TOWARD noon Derringforth received a note from Burrock inclosing a check for two hundred and eleven dollars and thirteen cents.

"This is your net profit after deducting brokerage," he wrote. "Not a bad go for the first—gives you something to operate on. Couldn't wait till lunch—knew you were in the dumps—knew this check would brace you up—nothing like something you can take hold of. You'll get there—a boom is on—must rush—see you at one, and talk over another flyer."

Derringforth gazed at the check with admiring eyes—almost with a look of amazement. It was difficult to realize that he had made this money without the investment of a penny or the turning of a hand; but there it was, and all the profit of a single day.

"It won't take me long at this rate," he said to himself, his imagination swinging loose, "to pile up a few thousand dollars. Burrock has made over twenty-one hundred on this single deal. I wish I had gone in heavier—I will next time. It doesn't do for a man in Wall Street to be weak-kneed.

I might just as well have a thousand dollars now as two hundred. It was a sure thing—Burrock said it was. I wonder if he has any more sure things! It was too bad to let such an opportunity slip by without making the most of it. I'll never do it again, that's one thing certain!"

Derringforth went to bed that night with an anxiety so keen, so deep, that for the time it overshadowed all other interests. Burrock had bought five hundred shares of Western Union for him. The stock was very active. There was a powerful bear combination trying to force it down, but the ground was contested inch by inch by the bulls. Burrock had confidence that the stock would advance, but it was a guess at best. He had advised Derringforth to take only a hundred shares.

"I think it's a good purchase, and may be a great one—it's a wonderfully active stock—bobs up and down like mad, but I'm going to buy a thousand shares and take my chances. I wouldn't be surprised to see it jump up ten points inside of two days—sure to do it if the bulls get away with the bears—ought to go to a hundred—paying regular dividends."

Derringforth had in mind how his timidity had limited his profit on St. Paul, and said he would have the courage of his convictions this time, anyway.

"I like your nerve," replied Burrock. "You're the kind that gets there—no use to be afraid!"

"That's what I think," replied Phil, with a tinge of pride.

An hour later he had grown a trifle more conservative. Western Union closed weak. It had dropped off more than half a point since his purchase.

He met Burrock in the evening, and together they saw a number of brokers and speculators. The consensus of opinion was that Western Union would be forced down further yet. There were ominous rumors afloat.

Derringforth went home with some uncertainty as to whether his temperament was exactly suited to Wall Street. With two hundred of winnings in his pocket he was convinced that it was. With his profit wiped out and another hundred gone with it, and all the work of an hour, he began to have serious doubts.

"As Burrock says, there's a delightful excitement about it all," he admitted—"delightful if one likes just that sort of

excitement, but I'm not so sure that I do. Three hundred dollars gone already, and maybe five!" Derringforth groaned. "Perhaps even more," he went on dubiously.

Burrock had told him to keep up his courage, urging that the deal would yet come out all right in the end.

"That's all well enough for Burrock," mused Derringforth. "He has the money to carry the stock for a turn, but I haven't. I shall be sold out—sold out with a loss, and just when I need money so much!"

Derringforth's reflections in the preceding chapter reveal a phase of his character. At one time he was disposed to regard the presence of Burton Edwards as providential. At another he felt a serious doubt; but the burden of his reasoning tended toward a belief in the overruling power of God. He had before now invoked the aid of Heaven in a half-hearted way when feeling most keenly the pressure of the Shylock's hand; but these appeals had lacked directness. They were mere breathings toward Heaven—a vague wish that aid might come from that indefinite source.

He had never been quite able to satisfy himself whether there was any response to these modest appeals or not. Once or twice he thought there was; once or twice he thought there was not.

Under ordinary circumstances he would not have resorted to the experiment again, but this was an extraordinary circumstance. His own hands were tied. He was utterly powerless to influence the price of Western Union one way or the other. He sat on the side of his bed and thought. It seemed to him that God alone was equal to the emergency, but would God have anything to do with Wall Street? There was much doubt in Derringforth's mind on this point.

"If it were only something a little more respectable there might be some hope," he reasoned. "I'm afraid that gambling isn't in very high favor in heaven, but the Bible says, 'Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' That's plain enough. I can't see why it shouldn't apply to Wall Street as well as to any other place. I fancy there are more men there that are weary and heavy laden than anywhere else on this earth. Unfortunately I am one of them, but I'm going to get out. Heaven knows I wish I were out now! If I only had more faith, I would ask God to help me. It's the only thing I can do. Perhaps the fact that I wish I had

more faith would count in my favor. It can do no harm, any way, to ask for aid, and there's an odd chance that it might be just the very thing."

But Derrington felt that there was a marked difference between asking aid from above in the case of a Shylock and in the matter of speculation. He had not hesitated in the one instance, but now his conscience was sensitive. He wondered if it would not seem blasphemous in God's sight. He shrank from doing anything wrong, but the case was so urgent that he could not dismiss it from his mind. He reasoned a long time with himself, and then somehow, before he realized what he was doing, he was reasoning with Heaven.

XXII

WHILE Derrington was in his room, feverish with anxiety and imploring Heaven's aid, Marion was breathing in delicious drafts of love. She and Burton Edwards were alone. It was toward midnight. They had been to the play, but came away at the end of the second act. Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley had gone up to the library.

This was the opportunity Edwards had prayed for. Marion sat on the sofa. He was in a chair a little way from her. He wished he were close beside her, but just how to get there was the question. He could hear the ticking of the clock in the foyer, and knew that the precious minutes were vanishing. There were so many things to say, and so little time to say them in, that he found a beginning difficult.

He felt a restraint that was akin to awkwardness. This feeling was intensified by the fancy that sly laughter lurked in Marion's eyes. His cheeks took on a deeper red, and his conversation was painfully aimless. He could not understand himself. Had he not rehearsed a thousand times the words that now filled his soul to bursting? Why should they form a jam just at this time and clog the flow of his heart?

His dreams could not have been more perfectly mirrored so far as scene and time were concerned. There was no third party present to chill his spirits. The cozy room with its soft silken hangings and yet softer lights, the glow of the cheery fire in the grate, the midnight hush that was broken only by their own voices—all contributed harmony to the surroundings.

"Won't you play something, Marion?" he said in desperation at last.

"Yes, if you really wish me to," answered Marion; "but are you quite sure you do?"

"Quite—I'm in just the mood for music," he replied, saying to himself at the same time: "May the pardoning angel have mercy on my soul!"

"It's a rare mood for you, surely. I thought you disliked the piano."

"That depends upon who plays it."

"Then I'm sure you won't care to listen to an amateur."

"Oh, yes, I shall! Whatever you do gives me pleasure."

Marion blushed, protested, then tripped lightly across the room to the piano.

"What shall I play?" she asked, drumming carelessly on the keys.

"Anything that interests you."

"But I would prefer to interest you."

"You are sure to do that whatever you play," he answered, throwing a good deal of feeling into the words. "That's something like it," he said to himself. "This little scheme will put me at my ease."

Marion began playing bits of the latest airs. There was a good deal of expression in her touch, but it was not quite natural to her own ears. It betrayed an emotion that she dreaded to recognize—one that both delighted and frightened her.

Edwards watched the graceful fingers as they flew over the keys, but the music did not reach his soul. He had but one thought, and that one was embodied in Marion. He stood beside her and turned the leaves of the music.

"Here is something you know," she said, beginning the accompaniment of a love song that had caught the town. "Shall we sing it together?"

"Yes," answered Edwards eagerly. "It's the very thing to pave the way for me," he said to himself, as his voice blended with hers.

The love of his soul was poured out in the words of the song. It thrilled Marion. She was powerless to resist the spirit that permeated the very atmosphere. She looked up into his eyes. That look set his soul on fire. All the passion of his strong nature was aflame. The mad impulse to clasp her in his arms, and kiss her, was a delirium.

He had never known what consuming love was until now. He realized that a false move would be death to his hopes, but to restrain himself was torture. He

broke away from her side, leaving the song unfinished, and walked quickly to the other end of the room. He went to the window and looked out into the night. There, as everywhere, he saw only Marion.

He came back to the sofa and threw himself upon it. Marion still sat at the piano. There was intoxication in her playing. She was transported beyond herself—was under the spell of a strong man's love, and was powerless to tear herself away.

She knew why Edwards had left her side so suddenly, and blessed him for going, and yet she was sorry. She did not know just why she was sorry. There was something in his nature that drew her toward him; there was something that made her fear him. His influence over her was unlike that of any other man. She was conscious of enjoying the love that he breathed upon her; she was conscious of almost hating him for tempting her own love.

He watched her from where he sat, and wondered what her thoughts were—wondered that she kept on playing.

"If she were like other girls," he said to himself, "I would not be at a loss to know what to do. If she were like other girls, I should not care for her. There is something in her manner that says to me 'so far and no farther.'"

His mind wandered back to the Sunday evening when Derringforth had fallen like a meteor upon his vision. The hot blood burned in his cheeks. The pangs of jealousy pierced him.

His eyes were still fixed upon Marion. The sway of her graceful figure was poetry. The thought that possibly she loved Derringforth was torture. He wondered if she would never cease playing. He looked at his watch, opening and shutting it so that it would not attract her attention. It was almost midnight. He grew impatient, and raved at himself for the fiasco he had made.

"Why did I ever ask her to play?" he groaned. "People never know when to stop when they sit down at the piano."

The love of a few moments before was becoming nullified. He found himself getting provoked. It seemed to him indifference and even rudeness in Marion to neglect him as she was doing. He was upon the point of remonstrating when she turned to him and said in her sweetest way:

"Now aren't you sorry you asked me to play?"

One look from her eyes melted all his

indignation, but not soon enough to remove the traces from his face before she saw it.

"No, certainly not. Didn't I tell you that I was just in the mood for music?"

"Yes, but I can read your feelings better than you think."

"How do you interpret them?" asked Edwards, coloring.

The blush was reflected upon Marion's face.

"I won't try to read beyond your dislike for my playing. I have been very rude—won't you forgive me?"

"I would forgive you anything, but really there is nothing to forgive."

"Oh, yes, there is—you can't deceive me; but I'll promise never to do so any more. I wonder if it isn't very late! I forgot all about time while I was playing."

"Her coolness freezes me," groaned Edwards inwardly. "No, it's not so terribly late," he answered. "I don't feel like going to my room. Won't you sit here a little while with me?"

There was a tender pleading in his tones that was love to Marion. She knew she ought to tear herself away from it. She knew that she was powerless to do so. She did not want him to propose to her; she did not want to check the delicious draft of nectar.

He got up and walked to the piano, leaned over it, and looked down into her eyes.

"You have not answered me," he said softly.

"Do you want me to stay very much?" she said, turning her face toward his.

"More than you can realize, Marion," he replied, with a feeling that was unmistakable.

She swung a little away from him on the piano stool, and looked down irresolutely.

"Come and sit here beside me," he said, taking her hand and leading her to the sofa.

There was love in that touch. Edwards felt the warm blood bound through his veins. The beating of his heart, the emotion of his whole nature, choked his utterance for a moment.

The stillness was broken only by the ticking of the clock. The fire in the grate had burned low. The soft light sifting through the silken shade intensified Marion's beauty. She sat in graceful attitude at one end of the sofa. Her head rested upon her hand. She was the perfect pic-

ture of delightful irresolution. A dainty foot protruded from beneath her gown. Edwards sat a little apart from her.

"Marion," he said, and with the utterance of her name he unconsciously moved closer to her, "Marion, I—"

The sentence was suddenly cut short. A sharp ring at the doorbell startled them. Edwards felt the cold perspiration start out upon his brow. The bell rang again, and yet again.

XXIII

THE energy behind the doorbell was a devil-may-care telegraph messenger. He liked to startle people in the dead of night, picturing to his imagination, with a profane grin, the look on their frightened faces. He fancied that he could pull a bell so that it would ring a more horrible ring than could be produced by any other messenger on the force—a weird, dreadful ring that would carry terror with it.

It was a peal of this sort that sent consternation to the heart of Burton Edwards. There was something strange and ominous in the sound as it broke upon his ears. He knew as surely in the first instant as a minute later, when a telegram was put into his hand, that something had happened at home.

He tore open the envelope with trembling fingers. His face was white.

Mother is very ill. Come first train.—FATHER.

Edwards spoke the words aloud as his eye ran over the telegram. He handed it to Marion and turned away silently.

"I am so sorry," said Marion softly.

"It must be serious," answered Edwards. "Father would not have sent such a message otherwise."

"I hope it's not so bad as you fancy. Your father might have been suddenly frightened, and telegraphed you on the impulse of the moment."

"No, he wouldn't do that. I'm sure he has kept back the worst."

"I am very sorry for you, Burton. I wish I could say something that would comfort you!"

Edwards raised his eyes to hers. They were full of tenderness and sympathy. He took a step toward her and stretched out his hands as one imploring rescue. She gave him both of hers, with childlike trust.

Her wish was to comfort him. It was a generous, kindly motive. She had no

thought for herself; but the pressure upon her hands awakened the sense of danger. The impulse to tear herself from him was paralyzed. She could not escape. He drew her closer to him and bent his head toward hers.

"What has happened, Marion?" called her father at this instant from above stairs. He had hurriedly dressed and come from his room to learn the meaning of the frantic ringing of the bell.

"It's a telegram," answered Marion in trembling voice. "A telegram," she repeated, as she ran toward him like one escaping from some frightful danger.

Burton Edwards was not alone with her again. He took the early morning train for California.

When he had left the house, Marion went to her own room. How big and empty and gloomy the house seemed! Her head ached from a sleepless night; her heart ached from emotions that had stirred it to its depths. She stood by her window and looked out into the cold, gray morning.

The dim light was sifting in through the darkness. The fog hung damp over the housetops, settling down in the streets and sending a chill through the early pedestrians. Marion had never been up at this hour before; had never felt such a sense of depression before. She turned away with a shudder, and threw herself wearily upon her couch.

The furnace sent an abundance of hot air into her room, but it did not warm her. She drew a rug over her shoulders, and tried to forget herself in sleep, but the funereal atmosphere was too depressing for slumber. She opened her eyes and glanced aimlessly toward her writing desk. There was Phil looking down upon her from his silver frame. She turned her face away and buried it beneath the rug.

She had seen the picture a thousand times before, but she had never seen it as she saw it now. There was an expression in the young man's face that sent a shudder of self condemnation to her heart. It was not a look of accusation, but rather one of surprise and pain. Kindness and love were in the eyes; sorrow and gloom were about the mouth.

Tears stole down Marion's cheeks. She could not choke back her sobs. Her heart ached with an anguish that was deeper and keener than before. The sense of loneli-

ness had yielded to a different feeling. She knew she was doing wrong in breathing the atmosphere of love as she had on the previous night. She did not do it in defiance of her conscience. She felt an impulse to fly from Burton Edwards. She would have given anything to be safely beyond his influence, and yet there was a fascination so strong, so subtle, in the nature and quality of his love—it was so deliciously intoxicating, so sweet to her young life, that she yielded for another minute and sipped of the nectar of the gods—just another minute, and just another, until she had almost drifted into the very arms of passion.

The rug could not hide Phil's face from her eyes. She could see him looking down upon her, and the expression of pain and sadness, of love and kindness, burned into her very soul. It was the most severe reproach to her sensitive nature. She saw herself as she had never seen herself before. She recalled Phil's words when she told him that the engagement must be postponed.

"We can't tell what changes a year will make in us," he had said.

"The year is up to-day," meditated Marion, "and we have changed—Phil has changed—I have changed more than he. I have wanted to do right by him; I have wanted to care only for him, but our lives have drifted a little apart. I have been under influences that have led me away from him. This does not justify me, I know, but in a way it palliates the offense. It is not so easy to do always the same under different circumstances. If I had never gone into this gay life I should not have cared for it. I should have known nothing of admiration and flattery. It is a life by itself—a life of excitement and intoxication. I must be either one thing or another. I can't be half society girl and half—half something else. A compromise between the two would make me half wrong and half stupid. I can't adjust my conscience to both. Looking at myself in one way, I feel guilty; in another, I feel that I have done no wrong. If girls in society didn't accept attention and admiration—if there were no little flirtations—there would be no society. There would be nothing in it."

This line of reasoning began to bring relief to Marion's conscience. The expression in Phil's eyes was softer. It no longer pierced her heart with so keen an edge.

"With puritanical surroundings, I sup-

pose it wouldn't be so terrible to be a Puritan," she continued; "but in this age and in the metropolis and in society life—no, no, it can't be done! The Puritan would be a dismal failure. I couldn't be a wall flower—I wouldn't. I'd rather belong to the Salvation Army. There would be enthusiasm there, at least, and anything would be better than the heartache, and that is just what a girl has when she's out of tune with her surroundings. After all, I can't think I have done so very wrong. This is my play day—my outing before I settle down. One always has more latitude on an outing—does things that would—that would—well, that would make very nice old ladies raise their eyebrows in a terribly suggestive way. So then, looking at it in this light, I think I ought to be allowed just a little *abandon*—ought to have all the good times I can—in a proper way, of course.

"But there's the question—what is proper? I'm sure of one thing, and that is that I'm not required to be a Puritan in these days—in society, anyway. I suppose that a real little Puritan, if she had been in my place last night with Burton Edwards, and he had looked into her eyes as he looked into mine; if he had breathed the love upon her that he breathed upon me; if he had taken her hands in his as he took mine in his, I suppose—no, I'm not so sure—I more than half believe that she wouldn't have been a Puritan at all. I sometimes wonder if there isn't a good deal of humbug, after all, about this unnatural goodness that we read of, and that is held up as the correct standard. It's an insipid sort of life, it seems to me. It may be well enough for exhibition, but if there's no more nature in it than we are led to believe—if the inner life is as colorless and placid as the outer, then it must have been too stupid for anything. But I can't believe it. Human nature is human nature. Without its impulses and fancies and passions it would be as flat as a prairie, as uninteresting as a Puritan Sunday."

By this time Marion had justified herself to an extent that effectually soothed her conscience. She no longer tried to hide her face from Phil's eyes. There was nothing in them now—nothing about the expression of the mouth to harrow her feelings.

"Things are much as we see them," she meditated. "Fancy has so much to do with everything."

Her face was turned toward Phil's. She saw nothing of the look of half an hour before.

"He is the same dear boy he always was," she said to herself. "I suppose he would think it very wrong, though, if he really knew. He would have a right to be jealous. I should be horribly jealous myself if he were flirting with some other girl. This is as much as to say I was flirting with Burton, but—I don't know. I didn't think of it in that way. He was visiting us, and I—well, I just lived in the atmosphere of his love. I couldn't be rude to him. I didn't try to make him care for me; I didn't really want him to care for me, but somehow I closed my eyes and drifted—and such drifting!"

"But I wonder if Phil could see it in this way! It almost seems to me that I can argue myself into believing that anything is right. Perhaps I am wrong—perhaps I have done very wrong, but the more I reason the more I justify myself. Perhaps this is the way with every one who does wrong. I wonder if it is! If so, I can see how many who want to do right, and intend to do right, do wrong. Oh, dear me, it is all very puzzling! I suppose I ought to tell Phil everything. If he doesn't reprove me, then I've no need to think any more about it.

"But it would be pretty hard to tell Phil, and, after all, would it do any good? It might make him unhappy, and if I really have done wrong, telling him would not undo it. It would simply make matters worse. Still, he has a right to know. I should want to know. Perhaps there are some things he hasn't told me. Well, so long as I don't know them, I won't worry. It's foolish to think such a thing of Phil—he is simply old gold. I can't imagine him caring for any one except myself. I'm glad he hasn't gone into this gay life. If he had—no, no, I won't think of it!"

But she did think of it, nevertheless, and her heart beat heavily as her imagination pictured scenes not unlike that of the previous night between Burton Edwards and herself, enacted by Phil and some other girl.

Now that Edwards had gone, Marion had no longer any excuse for delaying Phil's call. It seemed to her that she ought to write to him and say that she was alone and would reserve the evening for him.

"I wish the engagement had never been

postponed," she said to herself once more. "It would have been better in every way. Mamma thinks I shall do as she wants me to; Phil thinks, I fancy, that I shall do as he wants me to. I can't please both—that's one thing certain. Whatever the result is, I shall not act meanly. I shall tell Phil to call to-night. I don't know how it will come out, but that makes no difference just now. Right is right, anyway."

XXIV

DERRINGFORTH had been at his office perhaps an hour when a messenger brought him a note from Marion. It said in effect that Edwards had been suddenly called home, and that she was free for the evening.

"I hope you have no engagement," she added. "It has been a long time since we have had a whole evening to ourselves."

"This is a devil of a fix!" said Derringforth, still holding the note in his hand. "I don't know what to do. I don't know where I stand. Maybe I'm bankrupt, for all I know; but I'm glad, anyway, that Edwards has gone—that's one thing sure. I shall feel a heap more comfortable, even if this Wall Street business breaks me. I wonder how the market will open!"

Derringforth took out his watch mechanically, looked at the time, and saw nothing. His face wore an expression of perplexity. The Exchange had not yet opened. His anxiety was painful, but withal he felt a sense of happiness that made his heart lighter.

The messenger still waited for an answer. His presence increased Derringforth's nervousness. The watch came out again. It wanted fifteen minutes to ten.

"I don't know what to say," reasoned Derringforth. "I want more than anything else to spend the evening with Marion, but ten days would give me a chance to put myself in better shape. I wonder why Edwards was called home so suddenly! I almost wish he had stayed. No, I don't, either," he added, jerking out the words almost savagely.

After ten minutes of vacillation, Derringforth sent the messenger away without an answer, and sought a consultation with Burrock.

Western Union had opened within a quarter of a point of the closing price, but that quarter was against Derringforth.

"Don't feel alarmed," said Burrock. "It's holding up splendidly—bears are

hammering it with a vengeance, but I think we shall see a turn in our favor."

"I hope so," replied Derringforth. "I never needed money so much in my life as I do at this minute;" and he told Burrock of Marion's note.

Burrock raised his eyebrows and emitted a shrill little whistle. Derringforth looked at him interrogatively.

"What shall you do?" asked Burrock, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"What should I do?"

"I don't mind advising you in the matter of speculation, old man, but—well, I'm too conservative, I suppose."

"I don't understand you."

"Simple enough. I go into the market and buy a thousand shares of stock—five thousand, perhaps—it's all chance—I know it, but on the size of the chance I can give a good estimate. I know what's liable to happen; but beyond this I am conservative—understand?"

"Nonsense, Burrock! You're naturally cynical, and you're in a more cynical mood than usual."

"Perhaps so, but—well, I've told you how I feel. What can I do for you? Anything but advise you where woman enters into the problem—the complications are too many, too great—that's all—excuse me, old man, excuse me—think it out yourself and leave this stock deal with me. I'll stand by you."

Derringforth was inclined to be amused at first, but Burrock's unusual seriousness impressed him with a strange feeling. He had never thought of woman in this sense. The conception sent a little shudder through him.

"You'll change your mind, Burrock," he said, "some of these days, and then you'll be sorry you ever deluded yourself with such ideas."

Burrock smiled. It was a smile that seemed to say:

"You poor, simple boy, I pity you!"

Derringforth colored and felt uncomfortable. He did not like this attitude in Burrock, but there was no time for argument now. He had slipped away from his office to learn something of the venture that meant happiness or misery to him. His decision as to whether he should spend the evening with Marion depended wholly upon the state of the market. With a good profit in sight he would not hesitate, but with a loss in view he would skirmish for more

time. Now that Edwards was no longer with her, Derringforth did not regard the delay of a few days as so serious.

Burrock was called aside, and Derringforth stepped up to the ticker and read the quotations. His fingers trembled slightly as he held the tape in his hands. The market, as a whole, was strengthening. He watched with anxious eyes for a quotation on Western Union. His time was up. He had already been away from his office too long.

He turned to go. Burrock called to him to wait a minute. He stepped back to the ticker. Western Union had advanced an eighth. He felt a thrill of excitement—only one-eighth of a point, but it meant so much to him!

"I told you it would come out all right," said Burrock, always cool.

"You're a prophet, old man," returned Derringforth.

"On the market," suggested Burrock, with a look that awakened an indefinable sense of repugnance in Derringforth.

Presently he went back to his office and telegraphed Marion that he would answer her note later in the day.

Western Union climbed up a little during the afternoon, but did not reach the point of Derringforth's purchase. The market closed with a good feeling, however, and Burrock, as well as all the bull clique, looked for better prices on the following day.

"I'm better off by a quarter of a point, anyway, than I was last night," said Derringforth to himself, noting the closing quotations. "But I don't like this frightful anxiety. I wonder what I should say to Marion! Perhaps to-morrow will bring me out all right—perhaps it will ruin me. I must have another day, at least. If I were to go to her to-night, I should have to ask her to postpone our engagement. If I could only have ten days more and a rising market—but I have no excuse for asking for the delay, as she had."

He compromised by asking for one day, saying that he was very sorry, but he had a matter on hand that would make it impossible for him to call that evening.

"I shall be free to-morrow evening," wrote Derringforth, in closing his note, "and I'll call on you then, providing, of course, that you have no engagement. I wish I could see you to-night. I'm sure the time seems no longer to you than it

does to me since we have had an evening together."

XXV

MARION had been at an afternoon function, and it was nearly six o'clock when she returned home. Derringforth's note was awaiting her. She had received his telegram, and had wondered that he could not tell, when he sent it, whether he was free for the evening. She had thought a little about it, speculated a little about it.

She could understand that there might be several reasons why he could not answer definitely, at the time of telegraphing, whether he could or could not spend the evening with her; but she wished that she knew just what the cause was. The thought kept coming into her mind, though she banished it a hundred times.

She tore open the note with rather more eagerness than she liked to display. Her mother saw this—saw the color that flashed to her cheeks. Marion looked up and caught her mother's eye. She felt annoyed that she should have shown any feeling, and went quickly to her own room.

There were traces of disappointment in her face as she saw herself in the mirror. She read the letter again, and repeated the words:

"I have a matter in hand that will make it impossible for me to call this evening."

"He might just as well not have written. He could have said in the telegram that he wasn't coming. I should have been quite as wise. Something that he doesn't want me to know, perhaps—more diplomatic to telegraph and then write—looks as if he had made the effort to come but couldn't arrange to do so."

Marion threw off her wraps, and tried to throw off the disappointment that held her in its depressing grasp, but she could not free herself—could not help feeling hurt that Phil should treat her so indifferently. She remembered the readiness with which he had assented to the suggestion in her note that his call should be postponed. It seemed generous of him at the time, but now it appeared in a different light. Many unhappy fancies flitted through her mind, each leaving a sting.

She was not accustomed to suffering. While Derringforth had learned to bear the grasp of a Shylock's hand—had learned to know the ache of a burdened soul—Marion had been flattered and entertained and

courted. She had had all the pleasures that wealth and society and adoration could give. It was a new sensation to be treated with what she regarded as indifference, and it hurt. She did not bear the pain as one accustomed to disappointments might bear it. The depression clung to her until it was gradually crowded back by a feeling of resentment.

"I haven't been used to such indifference," she said to herself. "I offered to give up the evening and tried to be nice to him, and I'm simply informed that it will be impossible for him to be with me. He owed me more of an explanation than this. I wouldn't have treated him as he has treated me. I wish I knew where he was going! I have foolishly flattered myself that he never went anywhere. I have thought of him as a sort of saint, but one can't tell much about a man, anyway. I should have kept closer to him. I have been blind, and have worried like a little idiot, thinking I wasn't doing right by him. How many good times I have lost! I wish Burton were here—he wouldn't treat me in this way. Phil has changed so. He isn't a bit as he used to be. I can't understand him; he doesn't help me to understand him. Maybe he doesn't understand me, and feels a restraint that makes him appear as he does."

At the last minute Marion decided to go to the Harburys'. It was to be a brilliant party, but she was not in the mood for social festivities; and yet she could not endure the thought of remaining at home alone. A year before she would have liked the prospect of a quiet evening with some good book; but books did not interest her now as they did then. They lacked the stimulant that she had learned to crave.

Mrs. Kingsley was exceedingly glad when she learned that Derringforth was not coming, and that Marion was to go with her to the Harburys'. She had not been blind to Burton Edwards's admiration for her daughter, and she saw with much satisfaction that Marion enjoyed his society.

There was a sense of safety in this, to Mrs. Kingsley's mind. The presence of Edwards, she argued, would tend to wean Marion from Derringforth. It would at least cause her to see less of him; and then there was always the possibility of some complication that would bring about unlooked for changes. Delay was the thing to fight for, she told herself.

Had she known that Marion was upon the point of falling in love with Edwards, she would at once have regarded him with an utterly different feeling. Her object was to keep Marion from marrying until she was at least twenty-five. So far as Edwards aided her in this purpose, just so far he was welcome at her house. She liked him. Her regard for him was genuine, and so long as he did nothing more than draw Marion *toward* him—not *to* him—she encouraged the association.

It was a disappointment to her that he was so suddenly called away. She expected as a matter of course, now he was gone, that Marion would give up the evening to Derrington. The day had been fraught with anxiety. She could not quite believe that Marion would ignore her wishes entirely and engage herself to Phil, and yet there was the possibility that she would.

Marion surveyed herself in the mirror when she was dressed.

"I never looked so jaded and old before," she thought. "It must be dreadful to grow old and ugly—to feel that the power to attract has gone—that the younger and prettier faces have all the attention and admiration. My cheeks are faded out; my eyes look as if I had had no sleep for a week. Oh, dear, I wish I were going to stay at home! I'm tired and disappointed and unhappy. I shall be as stupid as anything, I know. If Phil had only come we could have had a quiet evening. I wonder what is keeping him away! What would he think of me if he should see how jaded I look? Would he want to marry me now? It was just a year ago to-night—how happy I was! I would give the world to be as happy now—to feel that he loves me just as he did then, and to have him tell me again of his love as he did then!"

XXVI

It has often been said that the unexpected usually happens in Wall Street. Derrington had spent the evening in company with Burrock, and they had talked with a number of speculators. The consensus of opinion was that there would be a strong, active market on the following day. He went home buoyant with hope and eager for the night to pass.

The sun came up and hid itself behind a leaden sky. Derrington looked out from the window of his room. The dull light, the bleak wind, and the thought that

it was Friday awakened a feeling of anxiety. He knew that the nerves of Wall Street men lie close to the surface—knew how susceptible they are to the influence of little things, even to the state of the weather and the day of the week, if the day happens to be Friday.

True to the predictions of the night before, however, the market opened firmer. Burrock was early on the scene. He thought he could trace the hand of a combination trying to force prices up, and satisfied himself that the apparent strength was artificial and would not last.

He concluded to unload a portion of his holdings, and with the sale of his stock sold three hundred shares of Derrington's. The price obtained was slightly below the cost, netting the latter a loss, with interest and brokerage, of a little more than ninety dollars.

An hour later the stock had sagged three-quarters of a point. The market finally became dull and weak, and remained so throughout the day.

Derrington was thankful that more than half of his holdings had been sold. At the closing price of Western Union he could dispose of the two hundred shares he still held at a loss of something over two hundred dollars. This, together with the loss on the shares already sold, would make the transaction show a net loss of a trifle over three hundred.

Such was the status of his second Wall Street venture at the end of the day, and it did not furnish a highly gratifying outlook with which to go to Marion; but this was not the worst phase of the situation. Van Stump had given another turn to the twist.

After picking himself up, on the morning when Derrington threw him out of the office, Strum lost no time in acquainting his master with all that had occurred at the Derringtons' office. Van Stump was white with anger.

"They shall pay dearly for this," he said, bringing his fist down upon the library table in a way that emphasized his words. "I'll bring that young dog to his knees—he shall learn what it means to insult a representative of mine!"

"It was very humiliating," sniveled Strum, rubbing his smarting knee.

"It's exasperating—people I have been trying to help, too—I'll show them what's what! I'll crush them to the earth—yes, to the earth, the beggars! I'll take the

conceit out of that young whelp. He carries his head too high—too high, Strum. You will see his nose in the dust. I have wanted to get my hands on him, and now the time has come. I have another reason, too, for humbling the young upstart."

Had Strum succeeded in his effort to see the books of the Derringforths, Van Stump would have known exactly where to strike. It is one thing to get into a rage and threaten to do a thing; it is quite another matter to do it.

But Van Stump's anger was aroused. He was usually too cold to be moved outwardly. It was not his regard for his agent, in this instance, that stirred his wrath. Had it been some one other than Phil Derringforth who had thrown the sycophantic Strum out of his office, Van Stump's coolness would have been unperturbed. He knew of the relations between Marion and Phil. Since she had become a favorite in society he had acquainted himself with her history. The fact that Derringforth's name was so closely associated with hers caused him to feel a sense of power over her, since his hand was at Derringforth's throat.

Van Stump, like most bachelors of his type, was not sensitive. It made little difference to him what people said of him. He was Van Stump, in his own consciousness—Van Stump, the millionaire. What need he care about the opinions of envious poverty or the feelings of striplings, as he called young men, whom he was wont to brush aside with an air of indifference to their existence?

His money was a great big fact. He knew its power and made use of it. The smile of a scheming mother or the love glances of her fawning daughter amused him. He liked all this, and talked the sweet nonsense of youth. He knew that his money was a target for aspiring poverty.

He always saw two faces—the one fair and ingenuous, in which the soul of true sweet womanhood shone with a look of trust in him—of admiration for him; the other artful, cunning, cold, selfish—an expression that seemed to say:

"You old fool! How I am humbugging you, but your gold is well worth the sacrifice. It will be but a year or two, and you will be under the sod, and with the money once in my hands the world will be mine!"

But this did not affect Van Stump. His philosophy was greater than his cynicism.

"It's all a game of bluff," he had said to himself many times, "and woman is not the only one that can play at it!"

He liked to be with girls who had the beauty and freshness of youth. For those who were beginning to drop back into the second tier he had no time. They did not interest him. His object was simply to be amused. There was no sentiment in his soul that reached beyond the present. He had no attachments. One life meant to him little more than another. The girl who interested him most was the one from whom he could get most. Persistence was a notable characteristic of his. He did not know the meaning of the word "rebuff." His assurance fitted him perfectly for the part he played.

"If the striplings think me rude, what need I care?" he said to himself. "If some one yawns mentally and wishes me at the bottom of the sea, what need I care? If a girl amuses me, I talk to her and spend money on her; but I'm not concerned whether I interest her or not. That's her affair, not mine. If she avoids me, what's the odds? There are hundreds of others—every year an army of *débutantes* is let loose upon the world—and the clink of gold hath charms. With ten millions in my pocket I shall never grow old. I may totter on my staff, and yet shall I be an Apollo. Money is always in its prime, and, since in a sense I am money, I am and ever shall be in my prime!"

Van Stump reduced everything to a basis of mathematical calculation. He never devoted attention to any one without getting a *quid pro quo* for the time and money spent. New faces, new affairs, alone interested him. There was no stimulant, no intoxication, in old associations. Whenever he began to weary of a girl, he dropped her. He felt no compunction in doing this.

"She would do the same by me," he told himself; "but suppose she wouldn't, what's the odds? I am not in this thing for charity. I pay for all I get. I buy whatever suits my fancy. The transaction is cash. I run up no bills—place myself under no obligations—keep no books. One day a certain temperament suits my mood; at another time a different one gives me most pleasure—that's all there is of it."

Van Stump was not an anomaly. There are others whose god is this same philosophy—men who take girls to the play, lavish flowers upon them, and entertain them re-

gally, not because of any deep admiration for them, or any unselfish desire to give them pleasure, but because some such association is essential to their own enjoyment. There is no generosity in this. It is merely a cold business transaction—an investment of time and money that brings profitable returns.

Van Stump saw much in Marion to admire. He liked her bright face. Her conversation was clever and sparkling; there was laughter and mischief in her eyes.

He had annoyed her with his attention ever since her debut in society. His persistence, when a sense of decency should have told him that he was *de trop*, exasperated her. Her dislike grew finally into detestation, but her diplomatic mother had steadily urged the desirability of hiding her feelings. She had obeyed the injunction and made herself discreetly agreeable to Van Stump.

The fact of his power over Derringforth added to his boldness, and made him even more persistent with Marion than with other girls. He felt that he had a right to command her time, and he made himself more offensive in his attention than usual. Marion at length rebelled and declared that she would not be tormented by him.

"He is the worst old boor," she said to her mother. "No matter who is talking with me, he crowds his way up and simply monopolizes conversation with his stale compliments and threadbare, sentimental rubbish. I'm tired of it, and I won't submit to it any longer."

"I hope you won't be hasty, my dear," replied her mother with a persuasive smile. "It is always well to be discreet."

"Discretion isn't to be thought of any longer in his case," returned Marion. "He doesn't know the meaning of the word, and I shall not know its meaning again where he is concerned."

She was not quite so brave, at first, as she thought she would be; yet, true to her purpose, she did snub him, and in a way that would have settled a man of finer fiber. It had no effect on Van Stump. He laughed at the feebleness of Marion's effort and pressed his attention with malicious persistency.

He had laughed too soon. He did not know the spirit of the girl he was tormenting. He made the discovery a little later—too late for his peace of mind.

He had regarded himself as too indiffer-

ent to be annoyed by any girl, however she might choose to treat him. Van Stump, in his estimation—Van Stump, the millionaire—was impervious to any shafts of satire that a woman might send at him. He thought he could coolly laugh at her fuming—could enjoy as a mild joke the harmless sputterings of her rage; but he was to learn that there were exceptions. He was to learn the smart of humiliation, and to feel the sting of anger as it burned into a consuming blaze.

Marion had tried to make herself understood by gentle means; but she soon saw that diplomacy was of no avail, and determined to fence no further.

"I will not allow him to annoy me any more," she told herself with a flash of fire in her eyes, and then she told him the same thing.

She spoke the words coolly, but with a decision that was a revelation to Van Stump. He had never met a girl before who had the spirit to turn upon him, and for a minute he was nonplused. Then he began to laugh as if it were a great joke, but her words rankled within him, and he felt the tremor of anger forcing the perspiration from his pores.

"Whenever you have finished laughing," she said in a cuttingly satirical tone, "I shall make myself even plainer. We have misunderstood each other quite long enough, Mr. Van Stump!"

One remark led to another until Van Stump had seen a picture of himself that he could scarcely recognize—a picture that portrayed him as a consummate boor—a character so utterly selfish that he could barely contain himself. All his boasted coolness and indifference deserted him. The bitterness of his heart was stirred to its depths, and the dregs were poisonous.

XXVII

It was shortly after the occurrence of this spirited scene between Marion and Van Stump that Strum sought, during Mr. Derringforth's absence, to learn from Phil the exact state of the firm's affairs. The interview did not end quite as he had hoped—hardly as Van Stump had hoped. A somewhat lucid account of the manner in which it terminated only served to intensify the millionaire's anger. He had been thwarted in his first move—a move which had for its ultimate purpose the humiliation of Marion.

Van Stump had made a careful survey

of the situation, and, so far as he could discover, the ruin of Derringforth was the only possible point of attack on her. Her father was very rich, and her social position was unquestioned. She had been exceptionally discreet, and no word of scandal had ever been spoken against her.

"There is but one way to humble her," he said to himself, "and that is to crush Derringforth. After all, what's the odds? He's nothing to me, the poor beggar!"

Van Stump's animus was aimed at Marion, but when he learned that Derringforth had taken it upon himself to thwart his purpose by unceremoniously dumping Strum in a heap outside the office door, then it was that his hatred for Derringforth blazed out.

"I'll crush him into a shapeless mass!" he hissed, and the clenching of his fists added realism to his words.

His usual discretion deserted him. He came out from his hiding place and took a hand personally, though in a roundabout way, in the affairs of the Derringforths. He was too much in earnest to sit at home and idly await the result of Strum's further efforts.

With the twenty-thousand-dollar note due to Strum, as agent for Van Stump, paid and out of the way, the Derringforths saw a glimmer of sunlight streaming in through a rift in the clouds. It lighted up Mr. Derringforth's face, and would have had a similar effect upon Phil but for other complications, an account of which has already been given.

"There are three weeks of smooth sailing before us, Phil," said Mr. Derringforth, settling himself back in his big office chair with an air of relief. "Three weeks—it's a good while, but there's nothing that will trouble us. If we were only free from that Shylock, but—well, he can't bother us until the next note falls due."

"And that is three weeks from now?" queried Phil.

"Yes, and in the meantime I hope to make a turn that will give us the money to take it up in full."

It was on Tuesday that this conversation occurred, the day after Phil had pitched Strum out of the office. On Friday, just three days later, the firm was paralyzed by a blow from a friendly quarter. It came in the shape of a peremptory demand for the immediate payment of a large sum of money.

Mr. Derringforth was stunned at what seemed to him a cold-blooded, high-handed procedure. Phil had never seen his father so visibly affected before. He looked as if the last friend had deserted him—as if his confidence in humanity was gone.

"I have paid that house hundreds of thousands of dollars, as you know, Phil," he said, speaking as one almost doubting his own senses, "and I should as soon expect you or your mother to turn upon me in this way. I can't understand it, I can't realize it—the Hayden National Iron Company—a concern that I would have trusted with my very life!"

"There's something at the bottom of this," said Phil, scarcely less shocked than his father.

"There must be—these people have been my friends. They wouldn't treat us in this way. They knew exactly how we were pressed for money, and told me to take our own time for paying them. 'Your credit is good for any amount with us,' said Mr. Baldwin to me only last week."

"And he's the treasurer?" said Phil.

"Yes, the treasurer. There's something wrong somewhere, as you say," replied the father. "Something wrong," he repeated to himself, looking as one trying to peer into an impenetrable mystery.

XXVIII

THERE seems to be an irony of fate that delights in making things turn out strangely different from our fancies. Marion went to the Harburys', feeling blue and depressed. She expected a miserably stupid time, and, but for the prospect of a yet more dismal evening at home alone, would not have gone out. The party was one of the events of the season; it proved to be the event with Marion.

She had scarcely entered the room when a tall, finely proportioned man was presented to her. He was an Englishman, a cousin to Mrs. Harbury. Richard Devonshire was his name. He had been in America only three days, but he was not slow to discover the girl who appealed most strongly to his fancy, and to her he devoted himself almost exclusively throughout the evening.

That girl was Marion. She had never met just such a man before. He was a fascinating talker, a gratifying listener, and a gentleman of fine instincts. Marion was charmed with him, and was conscious of a buoyancy of spirit that was an extreme re-

bound from the gloom of the early evening. She had never in all her life appeared to better advantage. Her conversation was bright and sparkling, her manner imbued with captivating enthusiasm, her beauty intoxicating. Devonshire hung upon her words with an expression in his eyes that was an electric stimulus to her.

They walked and talked and danced together, to the envy of some, but to the delight of each other. The conversation finally turned on England. Marion said that she had been considering the idea of going abroad with the beginning of Lent.

"It all depends upon me," she added, "for papa and mamma are anxious to take the trip."

"I wish I could say something that would persuade you to go," replied Devonshire. "I shall return myself at about that time."

"Shall you?" exclaimed Marion, her eyes dancing.

"Yes, and if you will go, and if it would be agreeable to you and your father and mother, I'll arrange to sail on the same steamer with you."

"Nothing would give us more pleasure, I am sure," answered Marion. "The thought of having so agreeable a fellow passenger almost persuades me," she added, with a look that made the heart of the Englishman beat faster.

"I think I could give you some pleasure in England. At all events I should esteem it a favor to be allowed to do anything in my power for your enjoyment."

"You are very, very kind! I wish I could say now that I shall go, but I will let you know definitely within a day or two. I really cannot decide to-night."

XXIX

It was with an aching heart that Derrington ascended the brown stone steps of the Kingsleys' house. His venture into Wall Street, instead of helping him, had only added to his anxiety. It had already resulted in a small loss, and the end was not yet; but worse than this—a thousand times worse—was the crisis in the firm's affairs.

He would gladly give ten years of his life, it seemed to him, for a little more time, but he had told Marion that he was free for that evening, and he knew that she would expect him. There was no reasonable and satisfactory excuse to offer her for further

delay. No, there was no hope—he must go to her and ask that the engagement should be postponed or abandoned forever. The thought was torture to him, but there was no other way.

He entered the drawing-room, feeling like one about to pass sentence upon himself. Marion came down a minute later and greeted him in the old-time, cordial way.

"I am so glad to see you, Phil!" she said.

"And I am glad to see you," replied Derrington, taking both her hands in his. "I am always glad to see you, little girl."

There was feeling in the words as he spoke them, though he tried to hide the gloom of his soul and be the light-hearted boy of a year before.

Marion led the way to the sofa.

"I was afraid you no longer cared to see me, since you couldn't come last evening," she answered.

"It was impossible for me to come," he replied.

The words were out before he realized that he was uttering a falsehood. The sound of the last syllable had not died away when his conscience thrust a picture before his eyes. It was a distorted likeness of himself with the word "liar" written obliquely across it. He winced and shifted his position, moving cautiously a few inches farther away from Marion.

She made no reply for an instant. The silence gave Derrington time to feel a tremor of contempt for himself.

Meantime Marion was doing a little thinking on her own account. The thought flashed through her mind that it was only the night before last when she had occupied precisely the same position on that same sofa, and that Burton Edwards then sat where Phil now sat.

Derrington was wrought up to a highly sensitive state. Nothing escaped him. The flush of her face and the sudden confusion of her manner impressed themselves upon him with photographic accuracy. He interpreted these outward signs as evidence of contempt for him, fancying that she knew he had said what was not true. The thought of deliberately lying to Marion was revolting to his sense of manliness.

"It is the devil that's in me that spoke those false words!" he said to himself. "I never intended to say anything of the sort. It was *not* impossible for me to call."

He was upon the point of confessing when Marion said:

"I was bitterly disappointed." She raised her eyes. They met his, and a blush of self-condemnation leaped to his face. "I was right!" cried Marion to herself, stung by the pang of jealousy. "I was right," she repeated. "There is something he is keeping from me!"

"I'm very sorry," answered Derrington, struggling to appear natural. "I wanted to come more than you can realize, but you know you asked for a few days' delay, and so I went into a little business venture with a friend."

Derrington paused for an instant, and Marion, supposing he had finished, said:

"I didn't think you would let business keep you from coming to see me. Would it have kept you a year ago, I wonder?"

There was something in the way this was said that sent a chill through Derrington. Marion had tried to speak kindly. It was the pang of jealousy that keyed her vocal cords to harsher tones. He had intended to explain further about the business venture, and to confess the falsehood that was rankling in his soul; but he couldn't quite bring himself to do it now. There was an involuntary tightening about the cords of his heart. He answered guardedly, saying:

"I cannot always shape things quite to my liking. I have already said that I wanted to spend the evening with you, and I waited till toward night to see if I could not do so. In asking if I should have let business keep me from you a year ago you imply a doubt of my loyalty."

The word "loyalty" made Marion wince. Her own heart was her accuser—not Derrington.

"I didn't really mean that, Phil," she said nervously. "I felt hurt and disappointed, and you gave no reason for not coming. You give none now—not quite enough to satisfy a girl's heart. I didn't feel a bit like going out, and I thought we could have such a quiet, good time at home."

"I'm very sorry," repeated Derrington, melting again into sunnier mood. "I'm very sorry, but I hope my not coming didn't spoil your evening."

"Oh, no—I went to the Harbury reception, and had a most delightful time."

"I'm glad," returned Derrington. "As it turned out, then," he went on a trifle stiffly, "I hope you're not sorry I couldn't come—you would have missed a good time, and now you have me with you to-night."

Derrington paused for an answer. Marion hesitated. She would not utter a falsehood, and she could not well say how glad she was that she went to the party—could not bring herself to tell Phil of Devonshire, and of the delightful hours she had spent with him.

It was a trying moment for Marion. Her eyes were fixed upon the carpet. Derrington's eyes were fixed upon her. He was waiting. The flush on her cheek and the nervous fumbling with her fan answered his question. It could have been no plainer if put into words.

The answer stung his pride and wounded him almost to the death.

The blaze of the big lamp in the corner had crawled up to a point that terminated in a shaft of smoke. Derrington saw it streaming high toward the ceiling as he raised his head with a stifled groan, searching for something to break the painful silence.

"Excuse me," he said, rising suddenly and starting to cross the room.

Marion looked up and saw the smoke streaming from the chimney.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and in an instant was by Derrington's side.

"It's all right now," he said, as he turned the flame down beyond the possibility of further trouble.

"I wonder I didn't see it," remarked Marion, at the same time thanking Heaven for the relief this trifling incident brought her.

"You weren't looking in the right direction," replied Derrington. "I'm the one who should have seen it before."

He turned toward her and looked down into her eyes. His expression startled her, it was so unlike the Phil of the old days. He took a piece of bric-a-brac from the mantel, with the remark:

"This is something new, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Marion, "and it's a very rare specimen."

She eagerly seized the opportunity to turn the conversation from the theme that had so embarrassed her.

"An antique, I suppose," rejoined Derrington, apparently studying it with much interest.

"Yes, an antique. A friend of papa's brought it from Europe only last week."

"Europe is full of interesting things," returned Derrington. "I feel that I should like to go abroad and remain for an

entire year, away from business and business annoyances."

This remark was made with the view of leading up to his financial troubles.

"Oh, I wish you would go with us!" said Marion, with a sudden burst of enthusiasm, and, it may be said truthfully, with a thrill of delight at the thought.

"Are you going?" asked Derrington, looking up quickly.

"Mamma has been urging the matter."

The look that flashed into his eyes made her wish that she had been more cautious.

"When do you sail?" he asked, trying to appear indifferent.

"We may not sail at all. It isn't settled yet," she replied diplomatically.

His expression became grave and, Marion thought, a trifle stern. He stood erect, tall, and dignified. All the boyish lines of his face, it seemed to her, had yielded to the strength of his mature manhood.

"But when your mother urges anything isn't it as good as settled?" he said.

He had tried to disguise his feelings, but there was a touch of sarcasm in his words that cut.

"Mamma doesn't do all the thinking for the family. Your remark is hardly complimentary," returned Marion with considerable spirit.

"Pardon me—I didn't mean to be uncomplimentary," he said, returning with her to the sofa. "But I have had good reason to recognize the force of your mother's will."

An expression of pain came into Marion's face.

"I'm sure mamma has never urged anything with me that she did not believe best for me. No one knows that better than you, Phil."

"Yes, that is true, but one sometimes errs in judgment. It was just a year ago, little girl, that you and I yielded to your mother's will. You can tell better than I whether she or we were right."

Marion hesitated, thinking what answer to make. She tapped her folded fan lightly against her forehead as if to quicken thought.

"Why do you think I can tell better than you?" she asked, raising her eyes to his with an ingenuous query.

It was his turn to hesitate now, but at the end of an instant he answered:

"Because I have never had but one opinion—yours may have changed."

"In all the years you have known me, Phil, you have never found me so very changeable, have you?"

The expression of her eyes and the appealing tones of her voice made it plain to Derrington that his words had hurt, and they had. It was no easy matter for her to keep back the tears. He felt that he would like to take her in his arms, cry with her like a child, and for a time forget the past—forget everything but her.

"No, I have not," he said softly—almost tenderly. "Forgive me for the suggestion;" and then he killed the effect by an ill timed effort to justify himself. "But you know you have seen so much of life during the year—have had so many good times—have met so many men."

Marion looked up quickly with flushed face. The reference to the good times she had had and the men she had met startled her. Derrington saw the color in her cheeks and misinterpreted its meaning, fancying that he had again offended her. Not knowing just how to help matters, he said nothing, trusting to luck for an improvement in the situation.

A little silence and a good deal of thought followed. Marion was the first to speak. She had regained her composure, but the sting of her conscience was still felt, and the fear that perhaps he knew more of her flirtations than he had admitted prompted caution.

"You have been quite as free to meet girls as I have been to meet men," she said, bringing him forward as the subject of discussion. "Since they haven't influenced your opinion, why should the acquaintances I have made influence mine?"

"But I have met scarcely any one," replied Derrington, not altogether sure that luck had served him specially well. At all events, this was a turn to the conversation that he had not expected.

"You have never told me anything about the girls you have met," pursued Marion, in justification of her own omission to inform Derrington of the delicious little flirtations she had had.

"There has been nothing worth telling."

"Oh, Phil!" she said, with a captivating little gesture that should have made him own up to anything, true or false.

"There has not," he repeated, unmoved.

"Don't blush so about it, or I shall really believe there's something that you don't want me to know."

She was far more serious than her manner indicated. Derrington was angry at himself, but his color grew deeper. Marion smiled—a smile that irritated him.

Derrington shifted his position and appeared ill at ease, all of which had a tendency to confirm Marion's suspicions. It fed the slight feeling of jealousy already awakened.

"It seems to me we are drifting away from the subject," remarked Derrington, in the effort to free himself.

"Yes, drifting to a rather more interesting subject," answered Marion.

"Not to me."

"But to me!"

"Suppose we take them up in order, then, and return to the one with which we began? I believe we were trying to determine whether the year that has just closed has proved your mother's judgment to be right or wrong."

"Yes, but can we be sure either the one way or the other?"

"I don't understand you."

"I mean to say that without further knowledge of the future I can't see that we can say positively that mamma was wrong or that we were right. I'm sure you will admit this."

"I don't know that I shall," answered Derrington, with a growing suspicion that Marion was parrying with him, and that her views had changed a good deal more than she was willing to admit. The thought increased his reserve.

"Then, if we can't agree, what is the object of discussing the question, and what good can come of it, since we can't recall the past?"

"The errors of the past are guides to the future," returned Phil sententiously.

"Very true!" agreed Marion.

"Then why is there nothing to be gained by the discussion?"

"Because it seems to me that we can't settle the question as to who was in the wrong."

"Perhaps you don't want to settle it," said Derrington coldly.

The words left a bitter sting. They were nearer the truth than Marion was willing to acknowledge, even to herself; but it was the way they were spoken that hurt most. Her face flushed. Derrington watched her expression with keen eyes. The heightened color, the hesitation, the evident disquietude, all tended to confirm him in his

suspicion that Marion had wavered in her steadfastness.

He had come to her with the intention of telling her everything about his troubles—of telling her of his struggles to free himself from the grasp of a Shylock—of telling her of the torture he had suffered in the thought that perhaps Burton Edwards was winning her love, and of finally saying to her that it was he who must now ask that the engagement should be postponed, or perhaps abandoned forever. He had come with the belief that she would be true to her purpose of a year before, but the conversation thus far had led him to suspect that he was mistaken.

He turned so that he could place his arm upon the back of the sofa. He put his hand to his throbbing temples. The position brought his face directly toward Marion's. Neither spoke for a time. In the soft light, and in a becoming evening gown, so fashioned that it revealed a glimpse of a white, round neck, she was very pretty. Derrington thought of the past, and of the happiness they had had together; of the happy life they had planned to live together. She was handsomer now, as he saw her, than ever before. He had never craved her love so much as at this instant. To give her up—to think of her as the wife of another—no, no, he could not do that! The thought was maddening. He was miserably unhappy.

Marion was equally unhappy. The conversation had drifted in a way that neither expected—that neither desired. The love of their hearts had been forced back into deep recesses where its light could not be reflected in the eye, where its sweetness could not add music to the voice.

Marion, too, thought of the past—of the simple days of childhood—of Phil as he was then—as he had been all their lives. Her breast heaved with a suppressed sigh, and she raised her face to his. The soft, appealing look in her eyes penetrated almost beyond the reserve that incased his true nature.

Oh, that he had had the breadth and sweetness of soul to lift himself above himself, and, forgetting miserable pride, had reached out his hands to her! She would have taken them eagerly in the spirit in which they were given, responding with all the wealth of her heart—with all the depth of her love. One word from him would have been enough, and in her eyes all the

world would have been as nothing compared with him. One word from her would have caused him to forget everything in life but her—would have filled his soul with happiness sweeter and purer and deeper than all else of the treasures of earth. God must have turned away sorrowing that that word was not spoken.

Once or twice it hovered on Derrington's lips; once or twice it hovered on Marion's lips. If each could have seen deep into the heart of the other, their two lives would have blended into one. There would have been mutual confidence, mutual confidings, and love would have softened and sweetened and made radiant the soul of each.

But their better impulses were forced back, and two hearts moaned piteously.

"If your mother was right a year ago," said Derrington, finally breaking the silence, "why shouldn't she wish the same policy to prevail for another year, and perhaps another, and yet another?"

"Mamma thinks she was right," answered Marion softly.

"That makes the matter clearer," replied Derrington. His voice was not quite steady, though he was steeling himself against all emotion.

The situation for both Derrington and Marion was a complicated one. Had he been in a position to become engaged, he would have reached the subject in a direct way. He had come with the intention of telling in a straightforward manner of his almost hopeless financial condition, but the unfortunate opening of the conversation chilled him. He was in a highly sensitive state, due to the strain and anxiety that had reduced him almost to the verge of nervous prostration, and he readily became secretive, thinking it better to draw Marion out before opening his heart to her.

Marion, on the other hand, was at a disadvantage from the start. She knew nothing of Phil's misfortunes, and felt hurt, as a proud-spirited girl should, at his seeming indifference. He had not been himself for months. She had seen very little of him, and they had drifted farther and farther apart as the weeks went by. She blamed him, and had a right to blame him, not knowing the struggle he was undergoing.

Had he confided in her, he would have drawn her toward him, and she would have drawn him toward her. There would have been mutual confidence, and the love that

began away back in childhood would have continued to grow deeper and fuller and riper. The passion of the human heart cannot live on air, and will not thrive on memory.

Marion was scarcely less sensitive than Derrington. Detecting his diplomatic tactics, she felt that his treatment was cold and cruel; but she had too much pride to let him know her thoughts. Following his example, she became equally diplomatic—equally cold and indifferent. They were at cross purposes. Neither understood the other; each blamed the other.

One thing was plain to Marion, and that was Derrington's desire to find out, without committing himself, her feeling regarding the engagement. This was not manly, not generous, not right. It annoyed her, and she determined that he should never know without asking her.

He, on the other hand, could not ask her to engage herself to him, situated as he was; but if he were to confess his inability to assume such responsibilities, he thought he would never know her mind regarding the matter. With the almost positive knowledge that her mother would wish her to continue free, and with the belief—resting largely, to be sure, on an interpretation of misleading acts and utterances—that she herself was anxious to avoid the engagement, he vowed that he would say nothing of his own affairs.

"I have kept faith," he reflected. "With no prospect of an engagement, why should I humiliate myself before her? It was my place to tell her everything, as I intended to, had she proved herself worthy of my confidence."

A half hour later Derrington went out into the night. The parting was formal—not warm, not frigid, but exceedingly polite.

XXX

THE click of the door closing behind Derrington brought him to a realizing sense of his position. He was not only shut out from Marion's presence, but with equal truth, it seemed to him, shut out from her heart.

He had no sooner reached the street than he stopped and looked back, in the vain hope that he might yet see her face. He was upon the point of turning back to implore her forgiveness—to beg for the assurance of her love—when the door was thrown open. It was not Marion come to

recall him, but a servant, who an instant later closed the heavy outer doors. Derrington gazed longingly at the house. His head drooped; his shoulders sagged.

Marion hurried to her own room, and in the darkness went quickly to the window and looked out, with the hope that she might yet see Derrington. She looked down the street to a point where she imagined he would be, but saw no one. She turned to the other side of the bay window and looked in the opposite direction, but was not rewarded with the sight of him whom she sought.

She returned to her original position and again peered into the gray, misty darkness. Her heart cried out with disappointment and bitter anguish. She threw herself upon a hassock at the base of the window, and, with her head resting upon her hand, still looked far down the street.

A heavy mist that was almost rain made the atmosphere wet and cold. Marion shuddered, chilled by the sight and by a sense of loneliness so keen that the tears stole down her white cheeks. She wiped them away with her handkerchief, and in doing this cast her eyes downward.

At that instant Derrington threw up his hands in a pathetic gesture that seemed to say:

"It is all over—there is no longer any hope!"

Then he turned away, bent forward with a burden of sorrow that was crushing out all the spirit of his young life.

Marion was stunned—dumb, helpless for an instant, and then she raised the window and called to the man she loved to come back to her; but he heard her not.

Marion sank again upon the hassock and gave way to deep, bitter, cruel sobbing.

The angel of love had again taken the hands of these two and stretched them forth till they almost touched; but the chasm was not quite spanned, the currents of love not reunited, and each turned away in despair.

Early the following morning Marion received a note from Richard Devonshire, asking if he might call upon her during the forenoon. It was a straightforward request, written in a manly, clear-cut hand.

"I can't see him!" she exclaimed, thrusting the note away from her. "I must not see him again—I must not!"

She leaned languidly upon the arm of her

chair and pondered. Her eyes were fixed upon the carpet in a vacant stare. The presence of the maid who had brought in the note was forgotten, but the girl recalled her from her reverie.

"The boy is waiting for an answer, Miss Marion."

"Tell him there is no answer," said Marion, almost peevishly.

The maid closed the door and started to do as she was told.

Marion hurried to the stairs and called her back, with the remark that she must say something. She went to her desk and wrote:

MY DEAR MR. DEVONSHIRE:

I am very sorry, but it will be impossible for me to see you this forenoon, and unfortunately every hour of the day and evening is engaged. You are very kind to suggest calling. I wish I could receive you, but—

Here Marion paused. Her penholder found its way to her mouth, and she bit it very hard with her pretty white teeth in the effort to solve the problem. She got up, went to the table, picked up Devonshire's letter, and returned with it to her writing desk. She read it again.

"It's really very nice of him to want to see me," she reflected. "He's such a charming man, and so handsome! I should be sorry to offend him, and I'm afraid he would be offended if I refuse to see him. But I don't want to see him—I can't see him, and yet—really I ought to, I suppose. Mamma would wish me to, I'm sure."

She turned her head and saw the maid staring at her in dumb surprise. She felt a tremor of nervousness, and wished the girl would leave her. She took up the unfinished note and tore it into a thousand pieces, a rosy tint spreading over her face. Then she began a second letter:

MY DEAR MR. DEVONSHIRE:

I am very glad that you have not forgotten me.

She held up the paper, read what she had written, and then did some more thinking.

"I am glad," she said to herself, "that he hasn't forgotten me. No girl likes to be forgotten by a nice man the minute she is out of his sight. I wonder what he wants! I wonder—but I shall never know if I refuse to see him, and would it be treating him right to do so? It can do no harm to see him. I don't want him to call. I wish he hadn't asked me to let him call;

but now that he has done so, I don't like to offend him, and Mrs. Harbury—she, too, might be offended."

The note was finally finished, and an hour later Richard Devonshire was in Marion's presence.

XXXI

DERRINGFORTH turned away from before Marion's home in despair. He had stood there for hours, it seemed to him, but minutes were hours at that bitter moment. The unseemly haste in closing the outer doors and turning off the lights as soon as he was out of the house sent a cold shudder through him. It was not late. The neighboring residences were still cheerful and bright with illumination. Between them stood the Kingsley home, somber and gloomy.

Derringforth turned his eyes toward Marion's room, hoping even yet that a light would appear in her window for him—that he might see her face, or in some way be assured that she still thought of him, still loved him; but the longing of his heart was not satisfied. All was darkness.

Life had never been so black and bleak and dreary as at this instant. The foundations on which he had built had crumbled before his eyes. The hope which had been his life—which had given to it sweetness and inspiration and enthusiasm—was dead.

He walked on and on in the cold, wet night, suffering as only a sensitive, sincere nature can suffer. The pain was so keen that he could scarcely bear it. He felt that death would be a welcome relief.

"What is there left to me?" he cried. "With Marion there was everything; without her there is nothing!"

He had wandered far over toward the East River, and was walking through a gruesome part of the town. He had turned up one street and down another with no definite purpose, with no care for his whereabouts, when suddenly he was awakened from his reverie by the discovery that he was being followed.

His pursuer was almost upon him when Derringforth came to a realizing sense of his danger, and in a flash all the unhealthy desire for death vanished from his mind. The instinct of self-preservation sprang to the front with as keen a desire for life as Derringforth had ever known. Marion and all his troubles were instantly forgotten, and his whole mind was alert for

some way to escape the peril which threatened him.

He quickened his pace gradually. By this means he widened the gap between himself and his pursuer; but within another minute he was aware of greater danger. A low whistle sounded from the opposite side of the way and a little in advance of him. Instantly the man behind made a dash forward, while another ran across the street to cut off escape. The two were closing in upon Derringforth.

It was a critical moment. Either to turn back or to go forward would land him in the hands of the enemy. Derringforth thought quickly. The man in front, club in hand, was almost upon him. Derringforth sprang at his assailant and forced the fight. In a flash the club had been struck from the robber's hand by Derringforth's heavy cane, and a quick blow across the head sent him reeling to the ground, with a cry that pierced the darkness and awakened a slumbering policeman on the corner below.

His confederate's shriek terrified the other footpad, and instead of bringing his sandbag down upon his intended victim, he turned and ran for his life. Derringforth pursued him with the speed of a sprinter, and had almost run him down when the awakened policeman joined in the chase and captured him.

Derringforth explained the situation, and, with the officer, hurried back to where the other man had fallen. He lay there still, half stunned by the heavy blow he had received. The policeman lifted him to his feet, and in a few minutes Derringforth's assailants were on the way to the station house.

It was past midnight. The heavy mist had developed into rain. The air was chilly and penetrating, but Derringforth did not feel it. The encounter with the two robbers had sent the warm young blood bounding through his veins. A healthy glow was upon his face. His shoulders had regained their usual position, and he walked erect as he made his way homeward. There was a swing in his movement that suggested strength and power—suggested the man as he actually was, both in his own consciousness and in fact.

The contrast with the Derringforth of half an hour before was marvelous. Then he was wandering aimlessly, he knew not and cared not whither. His shoulders were

bent forward, his head drooped, his step was slow and uncertain. He had reached such a degree of despair that death began to appeal to him as the only deliverance from a misery which it seemed to him he could never endure. The thought once gaining access to his mind, it began to possess him, and, in a cold, unnatural, unhealthy sense, to comfort him.

There is a strange inclination in human nature to make a luxury of misery—to dwell upon it and paint it, in morbid fancy, in its most harrowing, most dreadful colors—in its most dramatic and gruesome aspects. This is specially true of women, but men are not free from it; Derringforth was not free from it.

It is a novel experience to be suddenly confronted with death just when one is yearning for it. It rarely makes its appearance at such a time. The difference between the real thing and the mawkish fancy of a disordered mind is so great that a man should be excused if, in unseemly haste, he abandons his desire to pass beyond into the unknown.

We excuse Derringforth and rejoice that his life was threatened by these two murderous scoundrels. Nothing could have brought him to his senses more effectually—nothing could have given him a fuller realization of his folly.

He shuddered at the possibility of what might have happened but for this incident. The thought of his father, struggling alone under a crushing load, and the picture of his mother, pale and broken-hearted, racked his soul with deepest emotion. It gave him a realization of his own selfishness that frightened him.

The encounter with the footpads was so heroic a treatment that it did more for Derringforth than six months would ordinarily have done for him. It was a tremendous shock, a tremendous struggle, a tremendous awakening. He was stronger and braver and better able to bear the sorrow of his life because of it.

XXXII

A YEAR of struggle had wrought a change in Derringforth, but he was still a boy when he called on Marion to tell her that the engagement must be postponed, and, like a boy, sensitive, petulant, almost childish, he was swayed by foolish pride.

When he entered his office the following morning, there was a quiet determination

in his face that suggested the man. The turbulent spirit of the boy had vanished, and in its place had come a certain firmness, a grim stoicism.

A close observer might have detected a trace of recklessness in his manner—might have fancied, too, from the dogged way in which he went about his work, that the sweeter elements of his nature had petrified into unyielding rigidity. There was a slight suggestion of cynicism about his mouth, and an expression in his eyes that was almost stern—perhaps more cold than stern—perhaps more pathetic than cold.

A crisis stared the Derringforths in the face this morning. The heavy hand of the Hayden National Iron Company was raised to strike them down. Behind that hand was Van Stump.

In his search for some means to crush the Derringforths, Van Stump discovered that they were large debtors of the Hayden Company. The latter was a corporation whose stock was listed on the New York Exchange. It was, therefore, a comparatively easy matter for him to buy a controlling interest. The business was prosperous, and the purchase would not only prove a paying investment, but would serve his purpose regarding the Derringforths.

In a couple of days he was in a position to dictate to the management of the Hayden Company, and the very first stroke of his hand was leveled at his victims. The amount of the claim was sixty-seven thousand, four hundred dollars.

The Derringforths had not expected to be called upon for this money. They had, in fact, been told to take their own time for paying it, and had accordingly felt easy in this quarter. All their energies had been bent toward freeing themselves from the Shylock who had brought them to the very verge of bankruptcy.

The demand from the Hayden people was couched in language that left no doubt of its meaning. Van Stump not only wanted to humiliate young Derringforth, but was anxious to crush the firm. The collaterals he held, for money advanced, were steadily increasing in value. With a better feeling in financial circles, the Derringforths would soon be able to raise money on them through legitimate channels, and then he would lose the securities that he greedily coveted. It was important, therefore, to strike without delay.

"Sixty-seven thousand dollars will smash

them," he muttered, gloating over the fancied downfall. "A clever move, getting hold of this Hayden business!" he went on, smiling at his own cunning. "A very clever move! It will crush them so flat that they'll never rise again!"

From the Derringforths his mind drifted to Marion, and a look of cruel triumph came into his hard, cold face.

"You shall rue the day, young woman, that you ever snubbed me!" he hissed.

Van Stump had presumed too much on the meekness and weakness of the Derringforths. A new spirit had entered the firm. Mr. Derringforth had magnified the importance of protecting his name. His sensitiveness on this point amounted to little short of weakness. Phil, from the first, had questioned the advisability of bolstering up a name by such ruinous expedients. He had protested mildly from time to time, but his protestations had been those of a boy; now they were a man's. He was in no mood for conciliating ugly creditors.

"I think we've had quite enough of this defensive policy," he said to his father. He spoke in a quiet, decisive way that lent force to his words. "In the effort to save our name we have ruined it. From the minute we placed ourselves at the mercy of that miserable Shylock—from that minute we were doomed. It was a mistake. I thought so at the time; I know it now."

"It was a mistake, Phil—you are right," responded Mr. Derringforth; "but we can't retrace our steps. We can't undo the mistakes of the past. We must meet the situation as it is to-day, and it is very grave."

"The past is dead," said Phil. "Let us forget it."

In the words, as he spoke them, there were indescribable gloom and indescribable resolution. They told a story that pierced the father's heart. Neither spoke for an instant. Phil was the first to break the silence.

"Let us face the future without sentiment," he said, "and meet the situation boldly. If we had only done this a year ago we shouldn't be where we are to-day. There wasn't a creditor then who wouldn't have cheerfully given us time to turn around in. We could have made a showing that would have satisfied every one of our ability to pay, and of the profitable business we were doing. But what might have been is neither here nor there. It's no longer a question of pride, but one of expe-

diency. This ugly demand from the Hayden Company has worried you until you are sick; it has made me mad. We have done the walking long enough; now let somebody else do it!"

Mr. Derringforth was astounded at the change in Phil. His manner, and the aggressive spirit he manifested, were a revelation to the father.

It was only after a prolonged protest that the heads of the Hayden Company yielded to Van Stump's dictation in regard to forcing a settlement from the Derringforths. On receipt of a reply from the latter, the Hayden management felt as if had run up against a stone wall. The letter, which was inspired by young Derringforth, ran thus:

DEAR SIRs:

Comment on your action of yesterday is hardly necessary. You can perhaps imagine our opinion of a house that would take the position you have taken, considering the years we have dealt together, and the assurances we have had from you—upon which assurances much of the business between us was done. Whether you can imagine it or not, it matters little; but what we wish to say is—and this we desire to emphasize—that there is some doubt, in our minds, about your ability to make an immediate collection of sixty-seven thousand four hundred dollars from this house. You may understand the situation better than we do, but, as we see it, we are persuaded that, if you attempt the measures you foreshadow, you will begin a walk that will prove a long and wearisome one to you.

Very truly yours,

DERRINGFORTH & DERRINGFORTH.

The letter was at once forwarded to Van Stump. There was a mingling of contempt and sarcasm and defiance in it that he little expected from the Derringforths. He was livid with rage, and stormed about his library in a way that terrified Strum.

XXXIII

It was no easy matter for Derringforth to bring his father around to the fighting point; but the young man had developed a strength of will that prevailed in the end, and the letter to the Hayden Company represented the now dominating spirit of the Derringforths.

The condition of their affairs called for vigorous and extraordinary measures. A survey of the situation made it clear that some one should go West, to put certain property in such condition that it would be safe from attack. Mr. Derringforth was too nearly worn out to attempt the journey. He was actually ill, and ought not to have

been at his office. The only alternative was that his son should go, and at six o'clock that evening Phil stepped aboard the train at the Grand Central Station, bound for Nebraska.

Before going he called on Burrock to talk over the situation in Wall Street.

"The market has rallied a good deal to-day," said Burrock. "It has developed a strength that few men looked for. My advice is that you should hang on to your Western Union. While you are away I will look after your interests for you."

"All right," replied Derringforth. "You know I always act on your advice; but be sure not to let me lose very much on the deal. I'm the next thing to a bankrupt!"

It was a relief to Derringforth to get away from New York, and to feel that three full days stretched out before him, without a hand's turn to be done—no notes to pay, no mail to answer, no accounts to audit. The last twenty-four hours had been so long and so full that he felt older by a score of years. Until now he had not had a minute to reflect calmly upon all that had occurred. His suffering had been so keen, so deep, and so cruel that, it seemed to him, it never could have been compressed into a single day.

In memory he went back to the previous night, and saw Marion enter the room to greet him. He could feel her hands in his—could see himself beside her on the sofa. How far back it all seemed!—and yet the pain of his heart was that of a fresh wound. He thought of every word she had spoken and of every look she had given him. The scene stood out vividly before him.

Once he suddenly reached forth his hands, as if stretching them out to her. It was at that point where he had almost asked her forgiveness, almost begged for her love. A look of tenderness came into his eyes, and the rigid lines of resolution about his mouth began to relax. For a little time the old hopeful, pleasant smile was on his lips. The stern determination vanished, and he was a boy again.

But as his mind wandered on, and the breach between Marion and himself widened—as he saw himself leaving her with a formal good night—saw himself stopping, after reaching the street, and turning back, swayed by love too powerful to yield longer to his pride—as these thoughts surged through his mind, and he saw the house suddenly darkened, his expression changed.

A stony resolution came into his eyes, and the light of love and hope and sweetness faded from his face.

The devil—if there be such an individual—is popularly supposed to inspire all evil acts and to perform, personally, an overwhelming proportion of them. If it be so that he does all this, the activity of his majesty commands our admiration and paralyzes our comprehension. He is certainly very great in his line.

But there is a suspicion, in the minds of people who think a little now and again, that it would be a trifle more just if humanity, as a whole, would to some extent divide with this satanic genius the responsibility for some of the thoughts that go astray from the canons of morality and purity—would divide with him the responsibility for an occasional censurable act.

There are some things credited to him, however, that look very suspicious—assuming, of course, that he is what he is supposed to be. One of these is his trick of stepping in at a critical moment, and turning the current of one's thoughts in a way that changes one's whole life.

Marion was reassured of Derringforth's love by the discovery that he had waited so long outside the house, after she had said good night to him. She interpreted his motives perfectly, and her own love went out to him. In the morning she started to write and tell him all. She had written but a few sentences when the note from Devonshire was handed to her.

This was a crisis in her life. She had turned toward Derringforth, and, left to herself, the impulses of her heart and the true, womanly instincts of her nature would have led her to him; but she was not left to work out her destiny in her own way, guided by love.

It was at this critical point that the devil began to get in his work. Richard Devonshire became the instrumentality through which his satanic majesty gained touch with Marion. The result may be inferred from the following letter, which was written several days after Derringforth had started for the West:

DEAR PHIL:

I can't leave New York without telling you that I am going away. I hope I shall not have to go without seeing you.

I said something, you know, the last time you were here, about the possibility of our going to Europe. We have decided to go, and shall sail Thursday, one week from to-day. We may be

away a long time—perhaps more than a year, as papa wishes to spend next winter in Egypt.

I hope you will come to see me. I cannot go away happy, without seeing you. There is so much I want to say to you—there was so much I wanted to say to you the last time you called, but, as you know, there was an atmosphere of constraint that made us both untrue to ourselves. I hope you will forgive me, and come to see me.

As ever,

MARION.

If our tickets were not already bought, I should rebel, even now, against going.

This letter was sent to Derringforth's office, and from there it was forwarded to Nebraska. Before it reached him, Derringforth had left for Dakota. The letter was again sent after him, but before it had overtaken him he started East, having been summoned home by a telegram informing him of the serious illness of his father.

Mr. Derringforth had dragged himself down to the office for several days after Phil went away, but finally he gave up and took to his bed. His illness speedily developed into pneumonia, and he had no reserve force with which to combat the disease. He was worn out in body and mind by the struggle he had undergone. The blow from the Hayden Company was the final stroke that crushed him.

He was barely alive when Phil reached home. He had fixed his mind, it seemed, on holding on to life long enough to see his son once more. He had prayed that this wish might be granted, and had asked often for the time, as if calculating the number of minutes before Phil would come.

Mrs. Derringforth met her son at the door. One hurried glance of inquiry at her eyes, and his heart sank within him. She led him softly to his father's side.

A smile lighted up the dying man's face when he felt the pressure of Phil's hand. He opened his eyes and looked into Phil's. The son pressed his lips to his father's forehead. The father tried to speak.

"My boy," flickered on his lips, and he was gone.

XXXIV

MARION sailed without receiving any response to the letter she had sent Derringforth. A week of waiting and hoping ended in disappointment, and she went on board the steamer with listless tread. She had never known deeper depression—had never faced gloom so dense.

The thought of pleasures abroad, which

had won her consent to go, had lost all its charm. Her mind was as dull and cheerless as the morning. A nasty east wind was blowing, and a great gray mass of fog hung over the city and shut in the ship. Marion could scarcely have felt more oppressed if she were going to her doom.

When she had passed up the gangplank she stopped and looked back with the hope, even yet, that she might see Derringforth. She could not believe that he would allow her to go away without taking her by the hand and wishing her God speed. It was not like him to be unforgiving—not like him to be rude; and the failure to answer her note was rudeness.

At this instant a cab dashed down the pier. She saw it, and her heart gave a sudden bound. The door was quickly thrown open, and Richard Devonshire stepped out. Marion turned away and hurriedly sought her stateroom. A look of unutterable disappointment was on her face. Her last hope was shattered. The gangplank was run ashore, and the great steamer moved out into the dense fog.

"Oh, Mrs. Kingsley!" exclaimed Devonshire, some little time later, rushing up to her and seizing her hand with undisguised pleasure. "I've been looking everywhere for you for the last half hour!"

"I'm so sorry," answered Mrs. Kingsley, with a smile that made Devonshire feel very much at home with her.

"I had almost concluded that some dreadful thing had happened at the last minute to prevent you from sailing, and I was upon the point of going back on the tug."

"Oh, Mr. Devonshire!" protested Mrs. Kingsley.

"Upon my soul, I was. You can't imagine my disappointment; but where is Miss Kingsley? I hope she didn't fail to come."

"Oh, no—she's in her stateroom. The excitement of getting away and the early hour of sailing have given her a slight headache, and she thinks it best to be quiet for a little time."

If Mrs. Kingsley had said "heartache" she would have been more accurate in her statement. Possibly, though, she thought that Marion really had a headache; possibly she thought that the early hour and the excitement of getting away were responsible for her daughter's utter wretchedness.

To give one the benefit of a doubt is charitable—even commendable.

"I'm so sorry!" answered Devonshire, with a good deal of feeling.

"You are very kind," returned Mrs. Kingsley. "A few hours will quiet her head, I am sure."

"A few hours!" repeated Devonshire, an expression of disappointment coming into his face.

"That is not so very long," rejoined Mrs. Kingsley, understanding him, and secretly elated.

"Time is comparative, you know. A day is a year, or a year is a day, as the case may be."

"And how is it in this case?"

"I'm sure you know what I mean," said Devonshire earnestly, convincingly.

"Marion will be very much flattered. I shall tell her how time drags with you during her absence."

"Do, please! It's very good of you. I wish you would."

Compliments, sincere or otherwise, never fell flatter than these from Devonshire, when they were repeated to Marion. She was in no mood to be flattered by words from his lips. She had fled to her state-room to escape him—had fled there to be alone. His compliments only served to irritate her, and the presence of her mother, bearing such a message, was scarcely less annoying.

A combination of influences had brought her to the point of yielding to her mother's will. Her heart had fought against going to Europe, but the peculiar circumstances surrounding her, her strained relations with Derrington, and finally the persuasion of Devonshire—an influence almost hypnotic in character—had overcome her resistance, and in a weak moment she consented to go. The promise was no sooner given than she began to wish she could recall it, but her pride stood in the way.

She wrote to Derrington hoping that he would come to her—hoping that he would rescue her from the influences that had persuaded her to do the thing she had fought against doing. One word of encouragement from him—one word of frank, sustaining love—and she would have fled to him and given him all the sweetness of her youth—all the love and confidence of her heart.

But he did not come to her—did not answer her letter—did not give any evidence that he had one thought for her. The

ship put out upon the ocean and she had not seen him. She was unspeakably wretched, and wished to be alone. It was while in this mood that her mother came to her with Devonshire's compliments. They were nauseating at this time, almost maddening.

"I wish you would be good enough not to annoy me with his flattery!" she said, speaking as she had never spoken to her mother before.

"Why, Marion!" exclaimed Mrs. Kingsley, astounded.

"I can't help it. I wish I had never seen him! If it hadn't been for him I shouldn't be here now."

"You should not be unjust, my dear."

"I don't believe I am. I have been persuaded to make myself wretched. I have yielded to please others—yielded to please him, in part."

"It breaks my heart to hear you talk this way, my child. God forgive me if I have had a selfish motive in urging you to take this trip."

"Forgive me, mamma," said Marion, drawing her mother to her and kissing her; "but I can't help thinking it's all a mistake. I know you have done everything for my happiness—have done everything that seemed to you best for me, but, my dear mamma, is the result all that you could wish? I was very happy a year ago—Phil was very happy; now we are both wretched. He has lost faith in me—hates me, perhaps. He didn't come to see me off—didn't answer my letter. I'm sure I have treated him very badly, or he would never have allowed me to go away without seeing me."

"Do you think you have treated him so very much worse than he has treated you?" asked Mrs. Kingsley.

"I'm sure I must have," answered Marion, bitterly condemning herself.

"I can't think your conclusion is right, Marion; but I would advise you to go over the events of the year carefully, and with a view to dealing justly with yourself, as well as with Phil."

Mrs. Kingsley paused, and the conversation ceased for a few minutes, during which time Marion's mind reverted to Derrington, and for the thousandth time she asked herself why he had not answered her letter—why he had not come to see her. She knew nothing of his trip West—knew nothing of his father's sickness and death.

"You spoke of being very happy a year

ago, Marion," said Mrs. Kingsley, breaking the silence, and speaking more seriously than usual. "Has the social life of the last year given you no happiness?"

"It has given me a great deal of pleasure," answered Marion.

"But not happiness?"

"A different kind of happiness."

"Wouldn't you expect a different kind of happiness now that your school days are over? Life is always changing. One cannot go back from one period to another and take up the old pleasures and find them the same. This is one reason why I have aimed to lead you into broader fields. Your happiness has been my study. I have lived for you, not for myself, and it hurts me, my child—it hurts me more than you can realize—to hear you say that you are miserable, knowing as I do that the blame for your unhappiness rests on me."

"I'm very sorry, mamma. I wish I hadn't spoken the way I did. I'm not myself this morning. You cannot understand how cruelly hurt I am at not seeing or hearing from Phil. I blame myself, not you. Forgive me, dear mamma! I'm selfish—I'm horribly selfish. If I hadn't been, I shouldn't have treated Phil in a way to offend him, and I shouldn't have spoken those mean words that hurt you so much. I was annoyed by Mr. Devonshire's silly flattery. I suppose I ought not to feel unkindly toward him, but I do. You will forgive me for what I said, won't you? I'm so sorry!"

"I am only too glad to forgive anything in you, my dear child," said Mrs. Kingsley, taking Marion in her arms with a mother's love. "I don't expect you, at your age, to understand life as I do," she went on; "but when you have grown older, I think you will see it from a broader point of view. This trip will be an education to you. You will be very glad, in a few years, that you had the opportunity to see so much of the Old World, and under such favorable circumstances. But what shall I say to Mr. Devonshire? He will naturally wish to know what you said when I gave you his message."

"There is only one thing you could say if you were to tell the truth."

"Imagine my saying to him that you requested me to be good enough not to annoy you with his flattery! That would be a rudeness of which I could never be guilty. Isn't it just as well, Marion, to be a little

bit reasonable? Mr. Devonshire is a gentleman. He has been particularly nice to you, and has done nothing for which you should blame him. He is ignorant of any motive you may have for wishing not to go abroad, and his desire that you should go is complimentary to you. He'll be on this ship with us for a week, and I hope you won't fail to treat him with the courtesy that he deserves."

"I don't like to be rude to any one," answered Marion, "but it was his persuasion that finally made me commit myself, and I've been sorry ever since, wishing I had never seen him. The feeling is unreasonable, I know."

"Then, if you realize that it is unreasonable, as it undoubtedly is, I shall have no further fears of your treating him rudely."

"What shall you tell him I said?" asked Marion, as her mother was leaving her.

"I haven't decided yet what you *did* say," answered diplomatic Mrs. Kingsley, with a triumphant smile.

XXXXV

THE load that had crushed Mr. Derrington was one that few men of his son's age would have attempted to shoulder. A few weeks before, Phil himself would have hesitated and turned away. The situation was aggravated by the death of his father. Creditors whose faith in Mr. Derrington, personally, had made them lenient in the matter of collections, now pressed hard for their claims.

The Hayden Company, obedient to Van Stump's command, sued for something more than sixty-seven thousand dollars. Phil contested the suit, feeling that he could well afford to pay lawyers' fees and court expenses in order that he might gain time; for time to him meant everything. The conditions of the Derringtons' transactions with the Hayden Company enabled him to make a technical defense. Their procedure had been nasty in the extreme. Phil believed that this blow from them was the final stroke that sent his father to the grave. He felt very bitter. The spirit of charity was not dominating his thoughts and acts just now. Pride did not stand in his way, as it had in his father's. He was ready to take any legitimate action that might improve the situation.

His first aim was to get out of the clutches of the money sharks. He discussed the situation with his mother, and

they agreed that the wise thing would be to turn their house into money at once. This was speedily done, and a sum was realized that enabled him to pay back several of the loans from Strum.

This released a lot of valuable securities which the latter had held as collateral. On these Derringforth was able to raise, through legitimate channels, enough money to take up the remainder of the firm's notes held by Van Stump.

A few weeks of his management, and Derringforth & Derringforth were free from the grasp that had dragged them to the verge of bankruptcy; but they were far from being out of debt. Their obligations had been lessened slightly—merely to the extent of the proceeds from the sale of the house—but, for the most part, they had only been shifted.

This change was not brought about without friction—not without an injury to the name that would have cut deep into the pride of Mr. Derringforth. Several suits had been begun against the firm, and the atmosphere was squally indeed. The standing of the house in financial circles had been very nearly destroyed; but this was inevitable.

Young Derringforth's boldness bordered on recklessness. Conservative creditors shook their heads ominously as they watched his methods, and pressed with redoubled vigor for the collection of their claims. There were others, of less timid nature, who saw something in the young man that commanded their admiration. They liked the fighting qualities he displayed; but had they known that he was plunging deeper and deeper into Wall Street every day, they, too, would have wagged their heads ominously.

When his father died, Derringforth held two hundred shares of Western Union. Had he closed out then, his experience in the Street would have cost him a trifle less than six hundred dollars. He went down to his office on the morning after the funeral with the intention of selling his stock—with a resolve to have nothing more to do with speculation.

A large accumulation of mail was awaiting him. The demands on his time were so numerous and so imperative that the thought of Wall Street did not come into his head until toward night.

"Another hundred—perhaps three or four hundred gone!" he reflected.

There was a look of resignation in his face. He had no hope that the market had turned in his favor. His manner was grave, almost gloomy. Dense clouds had set in about him, and they were so dark that his eye could not penetrate to the silver lining. An hour later a still darker tinge spread over them.

He had finished his dinner, and was sitting by the library table. His mother sat opposite. She was prostrated by the death of her husband. The atmosphere of the house was gloomy and sad. Derringforth had been trying to comfort her—had been trying to say something that would lighten the sorrow of her heart. He picked up a paper that had not yet been removed from its wrapper. He opened it and glanced over its contents. He was not reading. His mind was not with his eyes. He could not have recalled a word—not until the name Kingsley riveted his attention.

He read eagerly. A sickening sensation made him grasp the arm of his chair. The item stated that the Kingsleys had gone abroad for a protracted stay—perhaps two years. It went on to tell something of their plans, and ended with a highly flattering reference to Marion. It spoke of her as one of the most popular girls in society, adding that she had both beauty and cleverness to aid her in her social aspirations.

Derringforth turned pale. His hands shook as he laid the paper down. A steely coldness came into his face. He was trying to master himself.

The gloom of the night did not disappear with the coming up of the sun. The future seemed darker than on the previous day. Derringforth faced it with grim resolve.

It had been a night of bitterness, of sorrow, of regret, of indignation. He could see no light anywhere, but the sadness of his mother's face called up all his pity. He tried to speak a few words of cheer to her before going down town to business, but his words were without life; there was no cheer within his own heart. He could not give forth that which he did not have.

The day was on, and the work of the day must be done. The first thing was to close out his stock. He turned to the market report and ran his eye over the list. It rested on Western Union. He started, and then held the paper up closer, to make sure.

"An advance of five points and a quarter!" he exclaimed. "Impossible!"

Then he read the financial editorial, and

found that the quotation was correct—that the stock had actually made this sudden leap.

"This is marvelous!" he meditated. "It makes me richer by more than a thousand dollars than I was yesterday."

He had been so sure that the stock had made a further decline that he had not looked at the quotations in the evening paper, fearing that the loss would be greater than he even dared to fancy.

Gloom always breeds gloom. A shaft of sunshine penetrating the clouds spreads a flood of light over all. The atmosphere is warmed and sweetened and made buoyant. This sudden good luck reawakened an almost forgotten sensation in Derringforth.

He had pulled against a stubborn, adverse tide until his stroke had become fixed. He had plied the oars with a dogged persistency. Hope had played him false so many times that he no longer looked toward it. He had turned his back upon it with a frown. It was at this time, when everything was blackest, that this shaft of sunshine penetrated the gloom. He faced toward it with a glad heart. A new light was in his face as he looked forward to a career which, but a day before, he had resolved to abandon forever. Verily it is the little things of life that shape our ends.

XXXVI

THE scope of Derringforth's transactions in the Street constantly broadened. The tide was with him—luck was with him. His profits grew amazingly. It mattered little what he touched, he seldom sustained a loss. The excitement was exhilarating. It largely absorbed his thoughts, leaving him little opportunity for unhappy reflections, and yet he could not get entirely away from these.

A good share of his time was still devoted to the old business of Derringforth & Derringforth. Everything connected with it reminded him of his father. The wound healed slowly. That other sorrow—that living sorrow—still cast its shadow over him.

Marion had been abroad six months now, and he had not heard a word from her. The letter she sent him a week before sailing was still in Dakota, tucked away in a dusty pigeonhole in the little country hotel, where Derringforth had stopped in the winter. He did not leave his address, and the proprietor of that inconsequential hostelry,

thinking that without a street number in New York the letter would never reach its owner, decided to hold it for him. It was accordingly put aside and forgotten.

Derringforth had been astounded, on reading of Marion's departure for Europe, to think that she would go away without giving him a chance to say good-by. He needed no further proof of her faithlessness. Embittered, he tried to force himself to forget her; but it is not an easy matter to forget one who has entered so largely into a life as Marion had into Derringforth's.

Down deep in his heart—far down beneath the bitterness and cynicism that tinged his thoughts—lurked the hope that some day he might receive a letter from her. A strange eagerness possessed him to get his mail on the days of incoming steamers from Europe. This feeling was incompatible with his efforts to forget Marion. He knew it, and despised himself for the longing that he had not yet been able to force from him; but each time the will pressure was increased, and the sweetness of his heart yielded to deeper cynicism.

Sometimes the thought had occurred to him that he was at fault—that Marion could not have written to him after his coldness the last time he saw her.

"I wonder if that is the real cause!" he reflected. "If I thought it were—but no, it can't be. There's no shadow of reason for such a belief."

Nevertheless the impulse to write to her almost mastered him at times, but with a grim resolve he choked back these better feelings.

One day, in searching through his pocket-book, he came across a clipping from a newspaper. The color suddenly left his face, and a dark frown gathered on his brow as he read. A strange, fierce light came into his eyes. Presently he took up the item and read again:

She has both beauty and cleverness to aid her in her social aspirations.

With a flash of scorn he crushed the scrap of paper and hurled it from him, repeating contemptuously the words "social aspirations."

"Nothing is too sacred to be sacrificed to this god of pleasure," he muttered, with a curl of the lip. "Little she cares for a man's heartache; little she cares for anything except the flattery and dazzle of society. Even my father's death has not

moved her, and it was she—this girl, whose heart hasn't a single throb of loyalty—whom I wanted to make my wife!

"Poverty was indeed kinder to me than I thought," he went on, swayed by the bitterness of his heart. "The grasp of that miserable, cringing Shylock was soft and tender compared with the fate I sought. God be praised that I escaped! I was blind, but now I see. Men are fools in their eagerness to enslave themselves. I was one of them—was ready to give up my freedom, my life—and for what? Love—love, did I say? No, no, there is no longer any such thing as love!"

The growth of Derringforth's cynicism had been stimulated by close association with Burrock. The latter had had an "affair," and his regard for woman was tinged with contempt. He had not sought to make Derringforth think as he thought. Had he attempted this, the effect would have been healthful on Derringforth, for it would have aroused his resistance. As it was, there was no guard against the insidious influence of Burrock's unhealthy views.

Burrock was not a man of fine fiber. There was a world of difference between him and Derringforth. Their association was a matter of accident. Wall Street had brought them together at a time when Derringforth was ready to grasp at any straw that promised the aid he sought; but beyond Wall Street there was little in common between them. As time went on, however, they grew toward each other. The growth was to the advantage of Burrock—to the disadvantage of Derringforth.

Burrock knew that Marion had gone abroad, although Phil had not mentioned her name since her departure—in fact, not since the night on which he had last seen her. It was evident to Burrock that a rupture of some kind had taken place. Derringforth's significant silence increased his curiosity. Delicacy of feeling was not a conspicuous trait in his character, but it had been sufficient to prevent him from mentioning Marion's name to Derringforth. There never happened to be a reasonable excuse for doing so; but one day his chance came.

It was Sunday. He was lounging back in an easy chair at his rooms, reading the foreign gossip. Presently he came across an account of a coaching trip. The mention of a Miss Kingsley of New York as one of the party fastened his attention. The

item went on to say that she was one of the most attractive American girls in Europe, and added:

It is rumored that Richard Devonshire, a young Englishman of excellent social position, who is also of the party, is paying devoted attention to Miss Kingsley; but his is not the only British heart that this beautiful American girl has set to quicker action. Lord Hethersford and the Duke of Huntingdon are also among her most ardent admirers.

There was a gleam of satisfaction in Burrock's eyes when he had finished reading this bit of gossip.

"Confirms my theory—just what I expected—wouldn't trust a woman far as I could throw an elephant—all alike—sorry for Derringforth—explains why he has kept so glum—something he had to learn, though—every man learns it sooner or later."

Burrock's concern for Derringforth was far less than his delight at what he regarded as the discovery of Marion's disloyalty. He had no object in wishing her to be disloyal beyond the desire to see his cynical theories about women verified. He was fond of Derringforth, in so far as his selfish nature was capable of fondness.

Armed with this cutting, he started out to find Derringforth. It was the opportunity he had been longing for. It would open a subject that he had not hitherto dared approach.

Derringforth was at home. Burrock shot a quick glance at him.

"No," he said to himself, "he can't have seen it. He's as cool and undisturbed as usual."

"I'm glad you called," said Derringforth. "I have just read a capital financial article. I want you to read it. We are going to have a strong market, mark my words!"

Burrock took the paper and glanced over the article in a half-hearted fashion.

"Yes, looks well," he said. "I think you are right—market should boom."

Derringforth began telling why he looked for an advance in prices, when Burrock interrupted him.

"By the way, old man," he said, plunging his fingers into his vest pocket and bringing out a scrap of paper, "here's something I clipped from to-day's *Herald*—may interest you."

Derringforth took the cutting and quickly ran his eye over it. A pallor like that of death came into his face; but beyond this

and a slight trembling of his hand as he passed the clipping to Burrock, there was no indication of the tumult within.

"You may keep it," said Burrock. "Doubtless interests you more than me."

"You are very kind, but it does not interest me sufficiently to stimulate a desire to retain it," answered Derringforth, with steely indifference.

There was something in the way he spoke that warned Burrock of the danger of proceeding further with the subject. Nevertheless, he was not going to be put off in this way. He wished to say his say about women—about this woman in particular. He was sure that she had misused Derringforth, and he wished to sympathize with him.

"I am glad, old man, you have so little interest in her—thought you were still in love with her—wanted for months to talk it over with you—glad I was mistaken—fortunate you've got over it so easily—she isn't worthy of—"

"Stop!" said Derringforth, raising his hand in a warning gesture. "Not a word that reflects on Miss Kingsley!"

The fire flashed in his eyes as he spoke, but his control over himself was perfect.

Burrock was chagrined. The hot blood burned in his cheeks, but he bridled his tongue with caution.

"I didn't intend to reflect on her individually," he said in an attempt at apology. "I know nothing against her personally—simply know that she's a woman, and that's enough."

"No, not enough to warrant you in even breathing aught against her, individually or collectively," answered Derringforth. His manner left no room to doubt his earnestness. "This is the first jar we have had, Burrock," he went on. "*It must be the last.* You will apologize for the reference you made to Miss Kingsley, or I shall forget that I ever knew you."

Burrock hesitated for an instant, and then held out his hand.

"I'm sorry, Derringforth. I certainly didn't intend to say anything offensive to you. I hope you'll overlook what I said. I know nothing against Miss Kingsley, and I'll take good care not to speak of her again."

Derringforth took the proffered hand, believing that it was extended in good faith.

"I'm sure you didn't intend to offend me," he replied, "and I'm glad you have

made it possible for me to forget this unpleasant incident."

XXXVII

A LARGE English steamer was plowing through the waves toward Sandy Hook. A pilot boat had just been sighted. The passengers crowded eagerly to the rail and watched it approach. It was to be the first contact with things of "home."

A little boat put out from the vessel with the huge number on her sail, and a pilot was rowed to the side of the big steamer. A bundle of newspapers was sticking out from his pocket. These were quickly bought up by the ocean travelers, thirsting for news.

On the forward deck was a tall, graceful young woman, with a bright, cheerful face that had won much admiration abroad. She leaned over her father's chair and ran her eye over the paper he was reading.

Presently Mr. Kingsley turned the page. Marion gave a sudden start and grasped her father's arm. A big display heading had attracted her attention. This is what she read beneath it:

Phil Derringforth, the young man who has made things lively in the Street for the last few months, has gone to the wall with a crash. His losses, as near as can be learned, amount to something over two million dollars. He was believed to be worth a clean million twenty-four hours ago; now he is that much worse off than nothing. The dramatic side of Wall Street is seen to perfection in his case.

Derringforth began speculating at about the time of his father's death, which occurred nearly two years ago. The firm of Derringforth & Derringforth, which consisted of father and son, was heavily involved at the time of the senior partner's death. It had been in a bad way for a year and a half. Young Derringforth showed great ability in managing the firm's affairs, after the business came into his hands—so great, in fact, that he was able to pay up all the indebtedness and come out with a profit; but he had become interested in Wall Street, and finally closed out the old business and gave all his time to speculation. His boldness brought him quickly into prominence. He was beginning to be a power in the Street when his mother died suddenly. The shock, it seemed, was very severe. He kept away from the Street for a few weeks, but on returning began speculation with a recklessness that seemed born of desperation. Luck was with him until he was stabbed in the back by a friend, a man named Burrock.

It came about in this way. It seems that about a year before the death of the senior Derringforth the firm fell into the hands of J. Harrington Van Stump, a rich Shylock who squeezed the life blood out of the house. Van Stump is well known in social circles, is very rich, and poses as a man of exemplary character. The Derringforths, up

to the time of the senior partner's death, did not know the hand that had dragged them to the verge of bankruptcy. Their transactions were had through an attorney—one Martin Strum, a tool of Van Stump's. After the father died, the son in some way found out the name of the real Shylock, and with the daring of a young man he entered into a fight that caused Van Stump a great deal of annoyance and eventually a heavy loss. There was mutual hatred between the two men.

Van Stump, as the story goes, bought a controlling interest in the Hayden National Iron Company with the purpose of crushing the Derringfords. He succeeded to the extent of driving the senior Derringforth to his grave. Young Derringforth finally came into possession of certain information that enabled him, in company with others, to make a powerful attack on the Hayden Company. The stock went down with a rush. Van Stump bought liberally, with the purpose of stemming the tide, but the *coup* was so well planned that the bottom seemed to drop completely from under the stock. Van Stump, always a coward, got frightened and sold his entire interest in the Hayden Company, netting a loss of nearly half a million dollars.

This was sweet revenge for Derringforth, but it was not all. The assault netted him a profit of nearly a hundred thousand dollars. This was the first big money he had made, and it gave him a sense of his own power.

Van Stump, it is said, was the most angry man New York has seen in a generation. He swore vengeance on Derringforth. War was declared; but the god of battle was with the young man until treachery in one he trusted landed him at the feet of his foe. It was a contemptible procedure on the part of Van Stump, and inconceivable on the part of Burrock. It seems that the latter and Derringforth had been old school friends, and that it was through Burrock that Derringforth got into speculation. The two had worked together for a time, but eventually Derringforth branched out independently of Burrock. The latter was envious of Derringforth's rapid rise in the Street, but, as a matter of policy, kept on friendly terms with him. He retained Derringforth's confidence, and was familiar with his assault on the Hayden Company.

Finally, through some means, Burrock was brought in touch with Van Stump. From that hour Derringforth's fate was sealed. Van Stump was kept informed of his plans. Every move he made or contemplated making was laid before the old Shylock. Armed with this information, it was not a difficult matter for him to lead Derringforth into a trap. Much sympathy is expressed for the young man in the Street.

It was a singular coincidence that the first thing that greeted Marion's eyes, as she approached home, should be this startling account of Derringforth's downfall, giving as it did a brief outline of his career during her absence of almost two years.

"Oh, poor Phil!" she exclaimed. "This is dreadful, dreadful—and we knew nothing about the death of his father and mother!"

"It is shocking," said Mr. Kingsley. "I cannot realize it."

In all the time Marion had been away she had not heard from Phil. Her letter remained unanswered, and she was too proud to write to him a second time. There was but one conclusion to draw—that he was angry and wished to break with her. The thought was a bitter one, but there was no other reasonable explanation. Why, then, should she humiliate herself by writing again? The possibility that her letter had not reached him never entered her mind.

He had deliberately ignored her note; had deliberately refused to call on her before her departure. This was a cutting conclusion for a girl of Marion's pride. Indignation was the inevitable result. The love of her heart was embittered. She tried to forget Derringforth, even as he, at that very time, was trying to forget her.

There was nothing in her life abroad to remind her of him; there was everything in it to bury the past beneath a constantly changing panorama of pleasures. Hitherto she had held herself in check, always with the thought of Derringforth; but now she was free to accept admiration and attention without restraint.

Conscience had dropped its warning finger. She filled her lungs with deep, long drafts of pleasure. She lived in an atmosphere of delicious intoxication. She was courted, admired, flattered, fêted. The exhilaration was sweet to her. It became her life, her soul, her very self. Suitors for her hand failed to entice her from these effervescent delights.

"Mamma was right," she told herself. "A girl ought not to marry before she is twenty-five. I certainly shall not, and I shall keep myself free from all entanglements, so that I can enjoy myself. One thing is sure—I will never become engaged until I am ready to marry. When I have grown tired of this sort of pleasure, then I suppose I shall marry, but I'm not going to tie myself down so long as I enjoy the life of a girl. There is plenty of time for me to think of marrying."

Richard Devonshire's fate was only that of many another man whose heart Marion had quickened to the tune of love. She managed with a clever tact that enabled her to retain the friendship of all, the admiration of many. This was true of Devonshire; it was equally true of Burton Ed-

wards, who still loved her deeply, though he had followed her to Europe and turned his face homeward without the promise he had sought.

Sometimes Marion contrasted the ardor of Edwards with the indifference of Derrington; but Edwards was not the only man she had contrasted with Phil. All alike had been compared with him, and, though she had tried to forget him, there was still, down deep in her heart, a feeling for him that she had never had for any other man.

Whenever her thoughts strayed to Derrington, she saw him as she had seen him in the past. There was no change in his appearance. He had grown no older. In fancy, she could see him at his office, pen in hand, busy with correspondence, or perhaps at home, reading in his favorite corner. She could see his father in his big easy chair, smoking an after-dinner cigar, and Mrs. Derrington, a little way from him, busy with some piece of fancy work. The thought had never occurred to her that anything out of the ordinary had taken place with the Derringtons during her absence.

This newspaper account, telling of Mr. and Mrs. Derrington's death, and of Phil's failure, was therefore a rude awakening. She was inexpressibly shocked. Her heart was warm with sympathy for Phil, while she condemned herself for the bitter feelings she had had for him—condemned herself for the little thought she had given him.

XXXVIII

COLONEL GEOFFREY RAYBURN invited Derrington to go down to his Southern home with him for a few days' rest. The invitation was little short of a command.

"Rest!" exclaimed Derrington, when the colonel mentioned the matter the day after the young man's failure.

"Certainly, and why not? You will never have a better opportunity. There is nothing you can do here during the next few days. Your affairs are in the hands of your lawyers."

"You are extremely kind," answered Derrington. "I appreciate the invitation, but think how it would look for me to go off on a pleasure trip at this time!"

"Hang the looks!" returned the colonel. "I'm your largest creditor, and if I don't grumble no one else should."

"But every one has not your generous eyes."

"Nonsense, nonsense, young man! Make your plans to start with me to-morrow morning. I can't allow you to break down—you owe me too much money. A few days' rest will give you a firmer stroke. You must put yourself in condition to jump in and hammer out another fortune."

It was ten o'clock on the morning when Marion had read of Derrington's failure. She stood by the rail of the big Cunarder that had borne her safely across the Atlantic. The steamer was moving majestically up the Narrows. Marion's heart beat with joy as she saw the familiar sights dear to all American eyes.

The great ship steamed steadily on, and presently ran into the busy waters of the Hudson. A ferryboat put out from the New York side and headed straight for the New Jersey shore.

The great ocean steamer loomed up like a monster beside the little side wheeler. A sea of faces peered over the rail and looked down upon the upturned faces on the little boat. Two men stood somewhat apart from the others on the river craft. One was a tall, athletically built young man, dressed in a traveling suit. His companion was his senior by a score or more of years—a man of military bearing and fine presence.

A cry escaped the lips of one of the steamer's passengers, followed by the frantic waving of feminine handkerchiefs. Derrington saw it, and saw, too, a very pretty face turned toward his with an eager smile. He looked in that direction for an instant, and then turned his head away without a sign of recognition.

Marion's heart sank within her. The distance between the two boats widened; the distance between herself and Phil, it seemed to her, was widening in geometrical progression.

It was a bright, crisp November morning when Derrington and Colonel Rayburn reached their destination. The soft rays of the Virginia sun made it seem like October in the Berkshires. Colonel Rayburn held the lines. Derrington sat beside him. The horses flew over the ground at a rattling pace. The air was exhilarating. Phil drew in long breaths and feasted his eyes on the scenery, made beautiful by the autumn foliage.

"This will do you a world of good, my boy," said the colonel.

"It has done me a world of good already," replied Derrington. "I believe my chest is larger by two inches;" and he swelled it with another long breath of that life giving air.

The horses shot between two great stone piers and into the curving roadway of private grounds. Derrington caught a glimpse, through the trees, of a typical Southern home. A flitting shadow attracted his eye and instantly vanished behind the foliage. The carriage swung to the left. The horses bounded forward. The trees thinned. A tennis costume, a racket, a graceful figure burst upon his vision. Ah, yes—another similar costume, flying after a ball that sped from the racket of a young man on the other side of the net.

XXXIX

DERRINGTON felt more at home with the Rayburns at the end of an hour than he would have felt with some New England family at the end of a week. He saw Southern hospitality in its perfection. It was a revelation to him—a delightful realization of a fancy founded on what he had read and heard. He was glad he had come, though but a little while before, when he first caught sight of the tennis players, he felt like leaping from the carriage and running across lots to the railway station, to escape meeting these girls. He had not known that the colonel had a daughter.

But no young man in his right mind could regret making the acquaintance of Dorothy Rayburn. He felt like calling her "Dorothy" already, and fancied that she was likely to call him "Phil" at any moment. Her cousin, Nellie Bradwin, was also an attractive girl, and Mrs. Rayburn was a charming woman. Stanley Vedder was the young man playing tennis with the girls when Colonel Rayburn and Derrington drove up from the station.

Vedder started to go after meeting Derrington and talking for a few moments with him.

"You mustn't go, Stanley," said the colonel. "I want you to help entertain Mr. Derrington."

Vedder's face lighted up. He did not want to go.

"I shall be very glad to do anything I can to add to Mr. Derrington's pleasure," he replied.

The two young men were of about the same age. The one had made a reputation as an athlete in college; the other had made and lost a fortune. The training of these two had been widely different. Which was the better equipped to fight the battles of life—Derrington, with an indebtedness of a million dollars and not a cent with which to pay it, or Vedder, with his enviable football record and a considerable knowledge of Latin and Greek?

Possibly this thought came into Colonel Rayburn's mind as he saw the two young men side by side. It would not have been surprising if he had asked himself which would make the more desirable husband. The look in Vedder's eyes whenever they met Dorothy's would certainly have suggested the query.

In the afternoon the horses were saddled, and the four young people mounted them and started off in gay spirits for an hour's royal sport. Vedder had cleverly managed to take a position that would naturally bring him beside Dorothy. Derrington did not notice the maneuver. He found himself between the two girls, and, as all rode abreast at first, he felt that he was in luck, happening to be just where he was when the start was made.

But when the main road was reached they broke up into couples. Then it was that he realized he had not been quite so lucky as he thought, for instead of two girls he now had only one. He fancied that he saw a slight look of disappointment in Nellie's face, and he feared that he had inadvertently made a blunder in falling in where he did.

"If Vedder had wanted to ride with this one ever so much, I suppose he would have made no move toward doing so," thought Derrington, a trifle uncomfortable. "This Southern courtesy is so excessively fine that I dare say he wouldn't utter a word of protest if I were to tread on his toes!"

But Nellie made herself so agreeable that before long Derrington's fears began to subside. They would have vanished altogether but for a move that transferred him to Dorothy's side. The summit of a high hill had been reached, from which a fine view could be obtained. All stopped to look at the surrounding country. When they began the descent, Derrington found himself beside Dorothy. He didn't know just how the change came about, but he was conscious of a sense of delight that he

was with her. He felt, too, that he had got out of Vedder's way, and that in itself was a satisfaction. Then the thought occurred to him that the stop might have been made at Vedder's suggestion, in order to bring about the change in so clever a way that he would not suspect the other's aim.

"These are indeed courteous people," he reflected. "I like such delicacy."

He was partially right. The stop *was* a diplomatic one, but it was Dorothy's diplomacy that had brought it about, not Vedder's. If Derringforth had looked back he would have seen a very troubled expression on some one's face; but he was not looking back just now.

"Here's a good stretch of road ahead," said Dorothy. "Shall we have a little dash?"

She turned her eyes toward Derringforth's. There was a something in them that awakened an almost forgotten thrill in his heart.

"Yes, indeed, I should like it immensely," he replied, with an eagerness that made Dorothy smile.

The horses were off on the instant and racing at full speed.

"This is glorious sport!" said Derringforth, when they had reached the foot of a hill and slowed down.

"I'm so glad you like it," rejoined Dorothy, with delight in her eyes. "I was afraid you would find our simple country life very stupid, but now I know how to entertain you."

"Your life here is charming," declared Derringforth, "and there's nothing I like so much as a dash on a spirited horse. These two are very evenly matched."

"They seem to be to-day, but Billy is a little the faster, I think. You are, aren't you, Billy?" she added, appealing to the horse himself for confirmation.

"I think I would be willing to back Jack against him," said Derringforth.

"All right!" laughed Dorothy. "We'd like nothing better, would we, Billy?"

Billy didn't make it quite clear whether he relished the idea of a race or not, but Dorothy cast the deciding vote, and it was settled that there should be a race between Billy and Jack, with the respective riders that were then up.

Derringforth forgot all his business troubles. His heart was as light as if he had never known a sorrow.

"She's very sweet," he said to himself, stealing an admiring glance much oftener than one of his cynical tendencies should. "I wonder why Vedder fancies the cousin! She isn't so pretty as Dorothy—hasn't the same charm of manner; but he probably knows what suits him."

Derringforth was not quite sure on this point, however, when they reached the house. He and Dorothy had dismounted and were standing on the veranda, chatting, when Vedder and Nellie rode up. There was a considerable difference in the expression of their faces. Nellie's was more than passively happy; Vedder's was more than passively unhappy. Derringforth was quick to note this, for he had expected to see each beaming with joy. He was puzzled by the contrast.

Vedder tried to appear light-hearted, but his effort was a palpable failure. There was no spirit in his words, no buoyancy in his soul. He seized the first opportunity to get away without seeming abruptness, and went home in a very gloomy mood.

In the evening, Colonel Rayburn and his wife, the two girls, and Derringforth, sat down to a game of hearts. Dorothy was prettily gowned in a light, soft silk that was specially becoming. Derringforth found himself admiring her. She talked very well and played very well. Now that they were side by side, the contrast between her and Nellie was certainly in her favor. He liked Dorothy's blue eyes better than the deep black ones of her cousin. Dorothy's features, too, were rather more delicate. She resembled her mother.

"Some people, though," he admitted to himself, "might fancy Nellie's looks more. I suppose Vedder does; but I can't understand him. He was certainly in the dumps when he came home from the ride."

It was a jolly game. Every one was in the best of spirits. Colonel Rayburn called Derringforth "Phil," and this made him feel even more at home.

The evening swept by and was gone. It had been a day of life and happiness to Derringforth. He was sorry that it was over, never again to be relived; but the hope of another equally enjoyable on the morrow gave sweetness to his sleep.

The morning dawned as bright as the one that preceded it. Derringforth went out on the veranda before breakfast and filled his lungs with the invigorating air.

"This is life!" he reflected, looking off over a wide expanse of beautiful country. "This is nature—not the cold, unyielding granite of the city. I like God's work!"

The door opened, and he saw God's work in its perfection. Dorothy was beside him, as fresh and pretty as a wild flower.

"Isn't this a perfect morning for our race?" she said, adding, with mischief in her eyes: "I hope you haven't weakened?"

"No, indeed! I'm anxiously awaiting the start," he answered, delighted by her beauty.

"You're enjoying the anticipation of victory, I see."

"It's best to cling to a sure thing," he laughed. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, you know."

"Yes, but faith often leads us a merry chase only to disappoint us in the end."

"And that is the way I shall find it in this race, you think?"

"Well, I warn you I shall ride to win."

"That is another way of saying I shall be beaten. All right! I have great faith in Jack."

"You persist, in spite of my warning, in enjoying the victory beforehand?"

"Yes."

"But the disappointment when you are beaten—just think of that!"

"No, I won't think of that. I, too, shall ride to win."

"I should be annoyed if you did not. We must have a fair race."

At ten o'clock Jack and Billy were brought out, saddled for the contest. The riders mounted and jogged along slowly to the place selected for the race. Colonel and Mrs. Rayburn, and Vedder and Nellie, followed in a carriage. Pedro, the coachman, and several of the other servants were early on the scene. It was a great event with them, and many were their wagers; but the betting was by no means confined to the servants. The colonel backed Jack, while Vedder placed his money on Dorothy's horse.

Vedder had recovered to some extent from his depression of the night before; still, he was not in a happy frame of mind. The disturbance of his heart caused by Derrington's sudden appearance at the Rayburns' was not so easily quieted.

Derrington wagered a box at the theater with Dorothy, including a supper at Delmonico's. She bet a silver cigar case. Nellie followed Vedder's judgment, while

Mrs. Rayburn, as a matter of courtesy to Derrington, bet on his horse.

"I tell you that Jack will win," said the colonel. "I have always said that he had speed, and to-day you will see it."

Interest was at fever heat when the flag dropped and the horses were off like a flash. Each seemed to know that something more than usual was expected of him—each imbibed the spirit of the occasion, and, responding to his rider's words, tried to vanquish the other.

The start was almost even, but at the end of a few rods Dorothy was in the lead. A great shout went up from the winning side, but the gap between the riders was not widened. Jack was beginning to attain a dangerous speed. Billy heard the clatter of his hoofs, and, urged by Dorothy, almost flew over the ground. The great stride of the bigger horse pushed him hard. The distance between them began to diminish, and a shout from the other side now rent the air.

A minute later, and Derrington was beside Dorothy. The horses were going like arrows. It was neck and neck with them. Derrington cast a quick glance at Dorothy. Her riding was perfection. Her face was bright with hope. He felt that the race was his, but he would a thousand times prefer to let her win it. Remembering her words of the morning, however, he could not give it away. He would not incur her displeasure even in the effort to give her a moment's happiness.

The stake was but a little way ahead. Derrington called to Jack for a final spurt. The response was instantaneous. Derrington was half a length in the lead.

"I told you so!" cried Colonel Rayburn, cheering wildly; but the great excitement was with the colored contingent. A mighty shout went up from those of them on the now winning side.

The stake was but a dozen rods away. Derrington was increasing the gap between him and Dorothy. The road swerved sharply to the right. Derrington was riding to a splendid finish, when a monster St. Bernard dog bounded over the fence on the left with a savage yelp.

Jack plunged suddenly to the right. The girth parted. Derrington kept straight on for an instant, and then fell heavily, the saddle beside him.

Dorothy was the first to reach him. She bent over him with frightened face. He

tried to get upon his feet with her aid, but he could not stand.

Colonel Rayburn was soon upon the scene. Derrington was placed tenderly in the carriage and taken home.

XL

DERRINGTON opened his eyes and looked about with a dazed expression. The fumes of ether were still strong in the room. The surgeon had just finished his work. Colonel Rayburn stood beside him, wearing an anxious look.

"Jack was going straight for the stake," said Derrington. "I didn't want to win, but she would have been offended if I had given her the race. Something happened. I never was thrown before. They'll think I don't know how to ride. She'll laugh at me. Well, she won the race anyway, and I didn't pull Jack, either; but I can't see why I was thrown. It wasn't the dog—no, it wasn't the dog. Something must have happened."

There was a touch of pathos in his struggle, half conscious as he was, to account for his fall.

"It was not your fault," said Colonel Rayburn.

Derrington looked up quickly. Reason began to assert itself.

"Not my fault?" he repeated eagerly.

"No, not your fault, but the fault of the saddle."

"The saddle?"

"Yes, the girth broke."

An expression of contentment came into Derrington's eyes.

"I knew something happened," he said. "I couldn't believe that I was thrown like a novice." Then, turning to the surgeon, he asked: "Is my leg broken, doctor?"

"Yes, and it's a pretty good fracture—both bones broken just above the ankle."

That expression of contentment changed suddenly. Derrington said nothing for a minute. He brought his hand up to his eyes. His brow was knit in thought.

"You'll be as good as new again in a few weeks," continued the doctor.

"A few weeks?" repeated Derrington.

"Yes, you could hardly expect the bones to heal in less time."

"Can I go back to New York with Colonel Rayburn?"

"Not for the world!"

"But I must be there. It's imperative."

"Nothing is imperative with you now,

young man, except to get back the use of your leg."

Derrington raised his eyes to Colonel Rayburn in mute appeal.

"Don't worry about your affairs in New York," said the colonel. "I will look after your interests there for you, and the doctor and Mrs. Rayburn will look after your comfort here. Dorothy and Nellie will entertain you, and the time of your imprisonment will slip by before you know it."

Forced to face the inevitable, Derrington did it graciously. It was useless for him to think of his business affairs, or to worry about anything. There was nothing for him to do but content himself and let nature do the rest. The tension of his nerves relaxed, and he found a sense of dreamy luxury in his enforced idleness.

The days swept by. The past seemed a century away. He was in a new world, with new thoughts, new impulses, and new realities.

But one day the past was brought vividly to his mind. The morning mail had just arrived. Dorothy ran quickly to Derrington with the New York papers. She never tired of working for his pleasure. Her coming always sent a smile of glad welcome to his face.

"You will make me wish these broken bones would never heal," he said, looking into her eyes as he reached his hand out for the papers.

"Oh, you wicked man!" replied Dorothy, with a gesture of protest. "Just think what you have said!"

"I've been thinking, and that's why I spoke as I did."

"Dreaming, I fancy. I must have wakened you when I came in. I'm so sorry!"

"Your fancy is wrong this time, though I must admit it is usually right."

"I don't know about that. I'm afraid it is very erratic."

"No, I don't think so. I have reason to remember the accuracy with which it hit the mark once, anyway. You recollect what you said the morning before our race, when we were standing on the veranda?"

"But I would have been wrong had there been no accident," returned Dorothy.

"'Buts' don't go. You were in at the finish, and I—well, you know where I was."

"That isn't fair to yourself. Besides, you wanted me to win the race."

"I wanted you to win it?" exclaimed Derrington, with a quick look of surprise.

"Now be honest—didn't you?" said Dorothy.

"Why in the world do you ask such a question?" returned Derringforth, a slight flush tingeing his cheeks.

"Ah, you did, didn't you?" she laughed.

She said this in a way that made Derringforth feel like admitting almost anything, but once more he dodged the question, nevertheless.

"I wonder if you won't charge me with being thrown purposely, so that you should win the race?" he returned.

"Oh, no, you certainly would have resorted to some cleverer scheme than that, had you dared to let me win."

"Had I dared to let you win! Why shouldn't I have dared to?"

"Because you were afraid you might offend me."

A deeper shade passed over Derringforth's face. Dorothy laughed at his evident perplexity.

"You didn't know I could read your thoughts so perfectly," she said.

"Upon my soul, I must stop thinking."

"Oh, don't do that! It's such fun for me to read your thoughts."

"I don't believe you can read them all."

"Haven't I given you convincing evidence of my powers?"

"You simply chanced the statement. I haven't admitted that I didn't dare let you win."

"You might as well, though—you know it's so."

"By what process of reasoning did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Ah, don't you wish you knew?"

"Yes—won't you tell me?"

"Perhaps, if you'll promise not to wish any more such wicked wishes as you did just now."

"I'll promise, but really I didn't wish that. I simply felt that there was more happiness here with a broken leg than anywhere else in perfect condition."

Dorothy's cheeks flushed now. The slight embarrassment only added to her beauty. Derringforth felt his heart beat faster. There was a minute's silence, broken by Nellie, who ran in to say that Mr. Vedder had just come, and that they were waiting for Dorothy to join them at tennis.

"Oh, has he come?" said Dorothy. "I'll be right out."

Nellie had already gone. There was a

look in Dorothy's eyes as they met Derringforth's that seemed to say:

"I would a thousand times rather stay here with you."

"I wish I could go out with you and take a hand in the game," said Derringforth softly.

"Oh, I wish you could!" returned Dorothy. There was infinite meaning in the words as she spoke them.

"I hope you will win," added Derringforth, after a moment's hesitation. His voice was hardly natural.

"Now you see the disadvantage of having a broken leg," said Dorothy, not heeding his last remark.

"Every phase and condition of life has its disadvantages as well as advantages."

"You are very patient."

"You credit me with a virtue that I fear I do not possess. It is my good fortune in being with such friends that contents me."

"I'm sure you are not just to yourself."

"Oh, yes, I am. If I were in some places, now, flat on my back, as I am here, I should simply rave against heaven and earth."

"Oh, you mustn't say that! I don't like to think of your raving against heaven. It is dreadful!"

"Pardon me, little girl," returned Derringforth. "I'm sorry my thoughtless words pain you."

This was the first time he had addressed her in so familiar a manner. He did not do it intentionally. He was sorry the minute the words were uttered, but he had no need to be. The slip of the tongue, although it brought a flush to Dorothy's face, seemed to add sweetness to the tone in which she said:

"I really must go—they won't forgive me if I keep them waiting so long."

"Their loss is my gain," said Derringforth. "You see, I'm selfish in keeping you from them."

"I'm the selfish one in keeping you from your papers," answered Dorothy; and before Derringforth had time to protest she was gone.

But Derringforth was in no mood for reading. He pushed the papers away from him, and stretched his arms above his head and looked idly toward the ceiling.

"Is this all a dream?" he said to himself. "Is this home nothing but a shadowy vision? Is Dorothy merely a delightful creation of fancy?"

He lay there and reflected for a long time over the events of the last ten days. They were startlingly dramatic. He could hardly bring himself to believe they were real, and yet was there not the pain of knitting bones as evidence of his accident?

The scenes had changed swiftly. A single stroke, and he had been hurled from the eminence of the millionaire to the jagged rocks of bankruptcy. But for this crash he might never have visited the Rayburns—might never have known the charm of Dorothy's smile—might never again have seen that sweet side of life to which his cynicism had blinded him.

"Does everything come by chance in this world," he reflected, "or is there something just beyond the range of vision that shapes our lives?"

When he had wearied of thinking, he turned to his papers. He looked over the market reports and read the meager news. He ran his eyes over the dramatic notes and carelessly scanned the social happenings.

(To be concluded in the June number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Suddenly he came across a name that sent a thrill through him. It was Marion's. He read eagerly:

Burton Edwards, a young Californian, and Miss Kingsley led the German. They were a strikingly handsome couple. Miss Kingsley never looked prettier. Her gown was a fine specimen of Parisian art.

This was the first intimation Derrington had had that Marion was in America.

"She may have been at home for months, for aught I know," he said to himself bitterly. "I should never have known of her return but for the newspapers. And Edwards! Edwards is with her!"

A frown flashed to Derrington's face.

"It is evident," he continued, with a curl of the lip, "that she keeps Edwards informed of her whereabouts."

This thought seemed to rankle within him. The past came surging back with startling vividness. He tried to shut his eyes to it, but this time his will failed him.

THE GOLDEN SOLSTICE

THE long, bright day is a voluptuous room
 With vivid walls of rich embroideries.
 Across gay squares of incense-burning bloom
 The warm air, thick with perfume, drifts
 Through emerald windows swinging on the sun.
 The songs of dawn are done
 And silence circles all
 Save where a chime of waterfall,
 Elfin with distance, rifts
 Its golden wall
 And steals through, delicate and thin
 As blended harpsichord and violin,
 To echo faintly in the splendid hall.

Too long, too bright that room, too merciless!

I reel its dazzling length where, at the end,
 I come upon you white with weariness.

I would lay lip to lovely lip
 And cool my fingers in your flowing hair,
 So loved you are—so fair.

But light and languor beat
 Your eyelids down till, drugged with heat,
 From out my arms you slip
 Into retreat

No word may reach nor love arouse.
 Beside the glittering couch whereon you drowse
 I, too, sink into slumber at your feet.

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

Mircami

ROMANCE, AGE-OLD BUT EVER YOUNG, STILL FINDS A HAPPY
HAVEN IN THE SOUTH SEA ISLES

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

THERE are some things that the mind of man can recognize without fully comprehending, and one of these things is the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

When people say that the Pacific is spoiled by civilization, they are right so far as the larger islands are concerned. There are motor cars in Tahiti, and worse at Honolulu; the boats bring trade to places that were once part of Fairyland; the soap manufacturer has his hand on the tall groves, and the Rue de la Paix stations its agents by the pearl lagoons.

But there are still islands in this vast world of waters where gasoline and gin have not entirely displaced the fragrance of frangipane and the milk of the drinking nuts, and where for an hour, even now, one may forget the problems of life in a world where the east is simply the place that the sun comes up from, and the west the place where he sinks.

Vauhine, for instance.

It is a very small island, yet a high one. You can see it from a long way off at sea, like a ship under press of dark colored sails.

Then, as you draw nearer, it broadens a bit at the base, and the darkness becomes the green of foliage. These are immemorial woods planted by the hand of God before man dreamed of the first canoe, or woman of the first shell necklace.

Slade came to Vauhine when he was a man of thirty-five, hard-bitten and pretty badly used by the world.

He came as trader and partner with a man named Lomax, who carried on in San Francisco. Lomax had his finger in all sorts of pies, and this trade station at Vauhine was the smallest of the lot. The copra to be obtained here was just enough to keep a single station going, and Lomax would have left the thing to some one else, but he

was fond of Slade, reckoned this was a post that would fit his limitations, and put him in charge.

It was a pleasant place for a man who had seen more than enough of the rough side of the world and of mischance.

The old bungalow belonging to the first trader—he dealt in sandalwood as well as copra—had gone out of repair, and the patching of it gave the newcomer something to do. The garden also gave him work; all sorts of weeds had to be rooted out and seeds planted, and new fences put up. For months he was busy and happy; he was making a home.

He told himself that come what might he would never leave Vauhine. Even if the trade station failed, one could live there without money; food was everywhere to be had for the scratching of the soil, or the dropping of a fishhook in the sea, and he did not drink.

The last great fact was the linchpin of his chariot. Without it, life in this paradise would have become degeneracy—a weariness developing into a horror.

II

ONE evening, six months or so after he arrived, Slade was leaning on the fence of his little garden, smoking and looking toward the sea, visible beyond the casuarinas and palms bordering the copra road by which the bungalow was placed.

Beyond and through the scene before him, he was looking at his past.

London and New York and San Francisco, the businesses he had engaged in and had failed at, and the fact that, leaving Lomax aside, he had no friends. He had been a rolling stone, and, more than that, he was not a man given to the easy making of friends.

There are some men, and sometimes they are rogues, who, if dropped in any part of the world, except maybe the Kalahari Desert, will begin to make friends with all and sundry, and attach other men to them as helpers, and with their help make success.

It is a wonderful gift. Slade did not possess it. Maybe it was because he was too honest, maybe because he was stand-offish by nature, reserved and not given to wearing his heart on his sleeve.

However that may be, it was so, and, being human, he sometimes recognized the fact of his isolation with regret, as on this evening.

Standing, pipe in mouth and lost in his thoughts, something beyond the far trees drew his attention back to earth.

Forms were moving against the light of the sea glow, and now they were coming along the copra road—forms of girls just up from bathing, the sunlight on their pareus, flowers fresh gathered in their hair.

Amid them was Mircami, the daughter of Poni, the fisherman, a girl who had attracted Slade's notice before this on account of a variation from the ordinary type. The nose of Mircami, unlike that of Kinai or Kenusi, or any of the others, was not broad across the nostrils, and it had a more definite bridge. There were other points that suggested European ancestry.

Having noticed her, he had nearly forgotten her. This evening, as she passed the gate with the others, she looked at him.

Their eyes met.

She passed on with the rest, and was lost to view beyond the tree ferns and jack fruits.

Slade, having watched her from sight, returned to his house.

He was no longer alone. Yet, ten minutes ago, had you mentioned Mircami's name, he would have had to think for a moment before disentangling her from the other people of the island.

She had never glanced at him before to his knowledge, and now, suddenly, her eyes had looked straight into his heart and soul.

III

ON the highest point of Vauhine, that is to say, on the cliff to the westward side, there is a stone chiseled by some long-forgotten craftsman and left there, no man can say why, for there are no temple places at Vauhine, nor gods carved from rock, as on Easter Island.

This stone, which is taller than the tallest man, is called by the Kanakas the Man Stone. It stands like a silent sentinel gazing out to sea, while the woods behind it whisper and shiver in the sea wind. It was here that Slade and Mircami used to meet, lovers pledged to marry when Adams, the missionary, paid his next visit to the island.

It was not what one might call a rapid combustion love affair. Slade had left behind him the fires of youth, and Mircami, owing perhaps to the European strain in her, was less inflammable than the ordinary island girl, more thoughtful, and with far greater depth of feeling.

They would sit and talk, the blue sea far below and the pattering palms and whispering casuarinas behind them. She could speak a little English, having picked it up from the former trader and from Adams, and Slade proved such a good tutor that by the time the missionary schooner was due to call she could carry on a conversation on simple matters without difficulty.

It was a love affair and a language lesson at the same time, but none the less a love affair for that, and between these two a bond began to form—a bond more genuine and lasting than that of passionate love—the bond of affection.

They became part of each other as if their beings had flowed together to make one river.

IV

ONE evening, a few days before the missionary schooner was due to arrive, Slade started out with Pari, one of the native boys, to fish beyond the reef. Fishing was the one amusement to be had at Vauhine, and it had several forms, spearing by torchlight on the reef, fishing in the lagoon for bream, or outside the reef for Tiapu, the great rockfish.

The outrigger canoe was down by the water's edge and Pari was overhauling the tackle, while Mircami, who had brought down the provisions and the drinking nuts, was busily engaged stowing them in packages tied to the outrigger gratings.

There is an unwritten law at Vauhine: you must not go beyond the reef without provisions and drink enough to last you for days. One never knows the chances of the sea, whose other name is the Great Thirst.

Mircami would have gone with Slade, only that she was no use in a canoe, and in fishing for the deep sea creatures, one must

be an expert. She hated these expeditions that took him away from the island by even a mile or two, yet they pleased him, and she said nothing, knowing that a word from her would make him give them up.

The drinking nuts tied to the gratings, she helped to run the little craft down until it was water borne. Then she watched it sail off in the last of the sunset light. The flash of Slade's steering paddle came to her while Pari broke out the sail.

Outside the reef the swell ran low, and the thunder of the reef to the sea was less than usual. The sun was taking his plunge into an ocean that boiled up to him like molten gold, and the breeze that had blown strong on their passing the reef died, so that the mat sail flapped now and then against the mast.

They were making for the fishing ground which lies a mile beyond the reef, where the depths run from forty to eighty fathoms. This is the place where the great fish congregate at night, and feed when they are so inclined.

Two miles to northward of the fishing ground there runs, for a distance of four miles east and west, a submerged reef at a depth of twenty fathoms. It is known as the great reef, and in heavy weather, at every seventh or eighth wave, it breaks in a pother of foam that has whirled many a canoe to destruction.

Pari, although only sixteen, knew the sea round here, and all its traps and currents. Night made no difference to him, and now, with the sun gone and the stars rushing out, he took the direction of affairs, holding on until Vauhine showed, a blur on the night, seemingly a great way to southward.

"It is here," Pari announced, taking in his steering paddle and tying up the sail, while Slade got the stone anchor across the gunwale and dropped it, letting the rope run until thirty fathoms were out. "It is here, and we will have luck, for the wind has gone and the sea has fallen asleep."

"Maybe," Slade grunted.

Then, taking their places, bow and stern, they fished.

These fish are uncertain: for nights together they will not look at a bait, and at Vauhine they once deserted the grounds for so long a time that the fishing canoes deserted them, too.

"They are not here," said Slade, after the lines had been down for nearly an hour, only to be hauled up to find that some small

nibbler had been feeding on the bait. "They have gone to follow the wind, or maybe, like the sea, they have fallen asleep."

"They are here," Pari declared, and almost on his word, and as if in answer to it, a chug came to Slade's line.

It ran out a couple of yards before he could get command of it, and then the fight began, the great fish zigzagging, sounding, now darting clear of the canoe, now astern. Pari, with the paddle, prevented the line from fouling the anchor rope, and Slade steadily made good.

Then, like a great silver sword in a bath of phosphorus, bending, straightening, flashing, the fish showed alongside, while Pari, maul in hand, waited to make sure of the stroke.

"Ohé!" cried Slade, and the maul fell, and the great fish stiffened after a last convulsion that covered them in spray.

They hauled it on board, and, rebaiting, dropped their lines. The dead calm held, and, from far off, the reef of Vauhine sent its whisper across the starlit sea. Suddenly the voice of the reef came louder.

"The wind has gone," said Pari, after a minute or two had passed, "and yet the reef still cries out."

As he spoke the canoe lifted under them to a steeper swell. It was as if a giant hand had raised them swiftly, but gently, toward the stars, releasing them to fall back in the trough.

It was a big lift, for the slack of the anchor rope was eaten up by it, and the strain on the rope made the canoe heel to starboard, so that the outrigger lifted clear of the water.

Pari sprang on the outrigger gratings to steady them, and the voice of the Vauhine reef grew even louder through the night, bringing with it another sound, the voice of tormented trees.

"The wind!" cried Pari.

It came on them with a rush, the great south wind that blows when it listeth, that comes always from a clear sky, and whose coming no man can foretell. It seized the sail and blew it out like a flag, with the broken sheet flapping against the stars.

It tried to capsize them, but Pari, with the knife he always carried, cut the anchor rope and, while Slade steadied the canoe with a paddle, recaptured the sail by a miracle and lashed it, giving only the smallest bunt to keep them before the wind.

To turn was impossible in that swiftly risen sea. They had to run or drown.

Neither of them spoke a word. Thought was wiped out by the wind and the stroke that death was making for them. They could only steer, while the stars looked down and the wind screamed against the guy ropes of the mast, and the spray dashed over them as the stern dipped an inch too deep or the paddles missed a stroke.

Then Slade, who had recovered thought, cried out:

"Pari, we are being swept away forever; the current is with us. Unless we turn we can go back no more."

"We cannot turn," replied Pari. "The sea is too great. We are dead, for before us is the great reef."

Slade had not thought of that. The thing scarcely troubled him. Death was nothing to being swept away from Vauhine and Mircami, yet they could not turn. Pari spoke the truth.

The wind had fallen, but the sea was as great as ever. Nearly an hour passed, and then, suddenly, Pari, who was in the bow, turned his head and flung two words back:

"The reef."

On top of the next swell, Slade, half lifting himself, saw it. A long burst of foam stretched to the east and the west in the starlight. It was a white wall that arose and subsided, for, viewing the northern sea from the next swell top, it had vanished.

He knew that it was not permanent, that it came only with the larger waves, and that if they struck the spot in the interval they might escape with a tossing, but at this moment escape or death seemed all one. He was looking on at the moving picture of another man's actions, without the interest that such a picture would afford him were he seated comfortably in a theater and untroubled in mind.

In other words, he had lost the capacity for reflection and calculation; the word "if" had gone out of his vocabulary. No man can be frightened who has lost the power of using as a counter of mind that wretched word of two letters.

Suddenly, and close to them, and against the full force of the wind, the great reef spoke, raved, and flung up a wall of foam. The black sea in front of them seemed to have gone mad under the starlight.

Then the depth of the following trough took them; they sank into it, and when the

spume-topped crest of the following hill raised them to look, the wall of foam was gone, leaving only acres of milk heaving to the stars.

Pari yelled, then he shouted to Slade to paddle hard, and, urged by the wind in the bunt of the sail and the paddles, they shot into the heaving cream. It fizzed like the wake of some titanic steamer of a million tons, and tossed them here and there as an idle woman might toss a ball of yarn from hand to hand.

The run of the swell, although broken, was not destroyed. It lifted them and sank them still, only now they were being lifted and sunk, not in a world of jet-black starlit waters, but a world of boiling and hissing milk.

Six times were they lifted thus, and then, almost at a stroke of the paddle, the black waters were around them again--and the great white wastes behind.

They had escaped the reef waters, but only by a minute, for now from behind them came the boom of the breaking sea.

To Slade it was like the bang of a door--a door that cut him off from Vauhine and the woman he loved, forever.

V

THE sun arose on a heaving swell all glittering gold in the east and wind-tossed violet in the west. The south wind still blew hard and strong, and to turn the canoe was impossible. Even if they could have turned her, they could have made no way against that wind and current.

"We shall return no more," said Pari, "and my fish spear and my lines will be used by Dakea. No more shall I pluck the feis in the great grove or pound the kava for Tomi. The sea has taken us."

Slade said nothing. Deep down in his heart there was a feeling that perhaps all was not lost. The escape from the reef was a good omen, and the splendid sun burning him now on the shoulders gave him heart.

He was not like Pari. To the native youth the open sea beyond sight of land was the utterly unknown and the utterly untrustable, a thing uncharted and holding only two sure things--death or separation from all that the islander holds dear.

At noon the wind fell to a strong breeze. An hour later, away on the port bow, far across the sea, there stood a white point that grew and broadened and became the sails

of a ship. Then it lifted until the dark hull showed, leaping clearer to sight moment by moment.

It was a topsail schooner, steering as if to cut their course. She held on without change or sign, like a blind thing that did not see them, and never would see them. She held on until the sun was broad on her canvas, and plainly visible was the foam at her forefoot.

Then, as if touched by some magic finger, she altered in form above decks, and the wind shivered from her sails.

Ten minutes later Slade and Pari were aboard her; she had taken the wind again, and the outrigger canoe, cast adrift, was tossing in her wake. She was the Sea Horse, twenty days out from San Francisco, and bound for Vana Vana.

VI

To lose a small Pacific island—unless you are a wealthy man, able to hire a schooner—is like losing your purse in a great city.

There are no sea roads between the small islands; at Vana Vana you might wait twenty years before getting a ship to Vauhine, and at Vauhine you might wait twenty years before getting a ship to even the nearest island, Tiari.

The Sea Horse was going north at the will of trade, and at Vana Vana it left Slade and Pari, who had worked their passage. They now got jobs ashore to keep them going until luck would bring a ship bound for San Francisco.

Once in San Francisco, Slade could depend on Lomax to send him back to Vauhine. There was nothing to do but wait, and hope, and work.

It was a man's job, with the figure of Mircami ever before him. She, without doubt, fancied him dead and gone.

There were times when the thought of her nearly drove him to despair. He visualized her waiting and watching through the storm, and through all the days that followed, for the canoe that never came back.

She would know of the great reef, and the certainty that they would be driven across it, and the almost certainty that they would be lost.

The reef would stand as a barrier between her and hope—the great reef that had wrecked the war canoes from Tiari in the old days, and since then had taken as

payment heavy toll of the daring fishers of Vauhine.

All this nearly turned Slade's mind to despair; but he fought it down. Then, one day a ship came, bound for San Francisco, and his heart leaped with hope.

She would take Slade with her, but the captain refused Pari. He had no use for a Kanaka on board his ship.

The refusal was absolute. The choice was given to Slade to go and leave Pari, or to remain.

This meant to leave Pari hopeless of ever getting back to his beloved home.

It was then that, just as the great reef showed to the deep swell, the soul of Slade showed itself to his Maker.

He refused to leave Pari, who had steered with him through the storm; Pari, who in this world of men was as helpless as a child. The consequences of the refusal were worse to face than the great reef, yet he faced them and came through triumphantly.

The day before the ship sailed two hands fell sick and had to be landed, and the captain, short-handed, now agreed to take Pari.

At San Francisco, Lomax arranged for the earlier sailing of the schooner that he used for trade with Vauhine, and on a day six months and a week after his departure from the island, Slade found himself back within the reef, with the anchor chain rumbling down to its echo from the cliffs and woods.

VII

THE beach was crowded as he rowed ashore. Poni and Timeau, Keola, Le Moan, Narau, Kalia were there, and a host of others that he knew; but he did not see Mircami.

They greeted him and his companion, not as people returned from the shades, but from the land of good fortune. Nothing that the sea could do would have surprised those islanders.

They had seen their canoe men come back apparently from the dead; they had seen the great storm of 1905, and the tidal wave that broke the following year, a wave that climbed the cliffs on the windward side of the island, taking back with it a little village and all its inhabitants.

"But Mircami!" cried Slade to her father, Poni. "Where is she?"

Poni's head fell just as it did when he was busy with the mending of a net. He said nothing.

Then a woman's voice piped up:

"Mircami is no more. The sea has taken her."

And then it all came out, told by this one and that, told in bits, picked up in little details through the days and weeks that followed.

It was as though some beautiful thing had been shattered to fragments, and Slade was always picking up the bits from this one and that, from Timeau, who told how she had watched and watched, hoping against hope for the return of the canoe; from Keola, who told how she had spent the nights sighing and without sleep; and from Le Moan, who had seen her last, wandering on the beach beneath the great cliff where the stone is, wandering and sighing, the sea wind blowing her pareu.

That was four months ago, and that afternoon came the great squall that raised the sea on that beach until the old blowholes, that never spoke nowadays, spouted.

"The sea has taken her," said Le Moan; "nothing of her remains nor will be seen again."

Slade absorbed all these details and more, took them in just as a stunned man takes in the air he still breathes.

He was done with life, yet he remained living. He even carried on his business as of old, and in such a way that the people around him began to forget his affection for Mircami, and those that remembered it came to the conclusion that his love for her could not have been great.

But Pari was not one of these.

Slade had saved him from Vana Vana, and his affection for Slade gave him eyes to see the truth. Pari had a limited mind, but he would have descended into hell for the sake of this white man.

He made this trouble his own; his mind cast about here and there in the business, as a dog casts about in search of game.

Dakea, he knew, had been in love with Mircami before Slade had captured her. Could it be that Dakea had killed her, and not the sea?

It was a dream that had put this idea into the head of Pari. Dakea was a tender-hearted, almost childish person, incapable of injuring any one, but this dream had been very definite. In it he had seen Dakea with a hatchet in his hand, and in his other hand the red shell necklace that Slade had given the girl.

So the evil thought came into the head

of Pari that Dakea, pressing his love on Mircami after Slade's departure, had been repulsed by her and had killed her.

The idea was helped by the fact that a change had come upon Dakea. He chose, these days, to be alone as much as possible, and if you were to call him suddenly by name, he would start like a guilty man and look at you with fright in his eyes. Also, at night, he would go into the woods, no man knew where.

One day Pari, who was nothing if not direct, took Dakea aside and charged him with the killing of Mircami. Dakea showed no anger.

"I have not killed her," said he, "nor do I know how she died; but this I know, her spirit haunts the spot where he and she in the old days used to meet, and where, peeping through the trees, I have seen them sitting hand in hand. It is the place on the cliff where the great stone is that fronts the sea. Ask any man here and he will tell you the same, though he will not speak of it unless asked. No one will go near that spot now, even in the daytime. Tomai has seen her, and so have others."

"And you have seen her?" Pari demanded, his face working.

"I have seen her spirit, white as the glint of the wave that breaks on the reef, or the cloud that passes and is gone."

Pari considered deeply on this matter. He was brave, but to face the darkness of the woods at night was beyond him. The thing called him, for Mircami was, as one might say, part of Slade, and her unhappy spirit was without doubt seeking for him in this real world.

He could not go by night to speak with it, yet he had courage to go at full noon, creeping softly up through the trees to see what might be seen.

VIII

SLADE was leaving his house for the beach when out from the trees stepped Pari.

"Talea," said the youth, using the name by which Slade was known, "much have we been together, and many things have we undergone; your heart is my heart, and that which strikes Talea strikes Pari. There is still before us that which must be faced, even as we faced the great reef. Talea, Mircami waits for you."

Slade drew back.

Pari continued:

"By night her spirit waits where the

great man stone watches the sea, and by day it waits in the groves. Follow me."

He turned and vanished among the trees, Slade following him, confused, filled with the vaguest and wildest imaginings.

He climbed, following Pari, who went before him, swift and noiseless as a shadow through the gloom of the trees, under the ever-sighing casuarinas, through the palm belt where the light came broken by the dancing fronds, through the canes and the last of the sandals, up and up toward the place where Mircami and Slade had so often met.

Here Pari, pausing and holding up his hand, drew aside the great leaves of a low-growing tree, and revealed the ghostly form of a woman lying in the twilight, her face upon her arms.

It was Mircami.

She was not dead, but sleeping—Mircami, who had vanished from the village and her people to live in solitude, alone with the memory of the man she loved.

And this was revealed to Slade by the bunch of feis which she had plucked for food, and which lay close to her in the leaf shadows.

He stood motionless for just as long as a man may exist without breathing after having drawn a long breath.

Then he withdrew, stepping backward, and leading Pari by the arm, holding him until they reached the great stone that faced the sea.

Here Slade fell on his knees; his eyes were closed, his lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Pari watched.

Then, after a little while, Slade stood up, looking about him, as though he found himself in a strange world. He laughed and spoke to himself, and then, turning to Pari, he said:

"She is not dead, but were I to wake her she would die. You must go to her and wake her and say: 'Talea is not dead, we have come back, he and I, and he waits you in the village.' Then, little by little, the

truth will come to her, which would kill her were it to come at once."

IX

PARI did not answer. He stood with his head lowered, looking at the ground.

To him Mircami was dead and a ghost; he had not dared to give her more than a glance, he had not seen the feis. His mind was not as the mind of Slade; he could not put things together.

Mircami was dead; the people had said so. Dakea had seen her ghost, and he, Pari, had seen it, discovered its hiding place, and led Slade to it, so that Slade might speak with it and give it rest, and perhaps find rest himself.

When the father of Tomai was drowned his spirit haunted the beach beyond the black rocks, and all went badly with Tomai until he met the spirit, and talked to it, and received instructions in the matter of the great fish trap which Tomai's brother claimed. When the dead come back, they have need of speech with the living.

That was all very well in theory, but to speak with the dead—aye, that was beyond him—and the fact of Mircami's death was with him a fixed idea. He would rather die than do this thing.

He stood with his head hung down, his dim soul struggling with itself, in confusion.

Aye, all astray, until the beach at Vana Vana came clearly before his eyes, and the bearded captain of the ship who would not take him, and the face of Slade as he stood talking to the captain, and refusing to go if he must leave Pari behind.

Then, suddenly, and as if breaking from a spell, throwing his great fear aside, yet with a face as gray as ashes, he made for the trees.

Even now, when he sees her living in happiness with Talea, there lurks in the mind of Pari a suspicion that Mircami is not as other women. She came back from the dead, and in this he is profoundly right—but not in the way he imagines.

THE RIVALS

THE March wind comes, a boastful swain,
To woo the young, reluctant spring;
But it is April's trembling rain
That stirs her heart to blossoming.

Joanna Roos

The Golden Wyandottes

MINE HOST TELLS A GENIAL TALE OF FAIR DEVON, WHEREIN
BIRDS OF A FEATHER FAIL TO FLOCK TOGETHER

By Eden Phillpotts

BEN PASCOE was one of the men who remind me of my dreams. You may have marked how the dreamer himself is always in the center of his vision, and Ben was like that: always in the middle of his own waking dream.

For life is a dream, according to two wise men I once heard talking in my bar parlor, and Pascoe looked at life from his own standpoint, first and last and always. In fact, he reckoned that all the other men and women had only come into the world to give him a helping hand. He allowed his Maker best, but none else.

This opinion tended to make him conceited, as you may suppose, and at sixty years of age Ben was a pompous and overbearing party without many friends. Not that he felt the lack, for he was full of his goods, which stood to him for human companionship, and he'd be that pleased with his own that he'd tell you nobody else in Thorpe-Michael had such pigs and potatoes, such apple-bearing trees, and such marvelous small fruits, as him.

He was a prosperous market gardener in a good way of business; but the vanity of the man magnified every shilling he made into eighteenpence, and he walked his five acres as if he owned the county. He had a long gray beard, on which he also prided himself; in fact, you may say that he was properly pleased with everything about him. He'd even say that, for quality of marble and dignity of design, not a tomb in our graveyard could cope with the stone he had set up to his wife.

Folk said she died of praising Ben, for there's no doubt he demanded a terrible lot of admiration from her. But she was a very different sort from him, and people missed her, though they doubted not she was glad to take leave of the man and go

where she would only have to praise her God.

But one article as Ben set no store upon happened to be the best of all his possessions; and that was his only daughter, Christie.

They never had got on none too well, for Christie appeared to have seen through her parent by the time she was fifteen. She liked a joke, and, though obedient always, I doubt not Ben had an uneasy suspicion, in his saner moments, that she might be pulling his leg—a thing he wouldn't stand from any living creature.

Christie Pascoe was a dark, black eyed and black haired maiden—slim and graceful, and very popular both with the boys and girls. But she pulled their legs also, and made one or two wild here and there.

She liked male company, however, and the folk guessed that she'd soon leave her parents' home, and felt very sure the man she chose would be a modest, go-by-the-ground fashion of chap, as different from Ben as she could find. But the far-seeing ones guessed that Mr. Pascoe would have a word in that matter, like he did in every other that concerned him, and time proved they were exceeding right.

II

BEN, in fact, decided when Christie was eighteen years old, that she was to marry Alfred Pritchard, the publican at Dittany, a hamlet over against us on the other side of the river Dart. And, strange to tell, 'twas at the identical moment when her father plumped for Pritchard that Christie herself lost her heart to quite another sort of man.

She knew, of course, which way her father's thoughts were turning, and she had been very good friends with Pritchard, as

she was with everybody else; but it happened that he wasn't her fancy by any manner of means, being a blustering, loud-speaking fellow, and nearer forty than thirty. His public house, the Orchards, was a prosperous place, and stood nigh the ferry and the landing stage, so he had plenty of custom.

As a fellow publican, I say no word against him; but he was whispered to be a thought devious in sundry particulars, though for my part I never heard nothing definite about his smuggling, and nobody, in my hearing, ever quarreled with his liquor.

He was a dark, blue-chinned man, with a lot to say about what he'd done in the war, before the Germans caught him and locked him up till the end of it. He had a bit of money, and was a successful poultry fancier, though other men in that line said his widowed sister, who kept house for him, was the clever one, and raised the winning birds. But Alfred took the credit and the prizes; and there's no doubt that Ben Pascoe thought very highly of him.

So, when he ordained one Sunday to go over the water and take Christie, and have tea along with Pritchard at the Orchards, the girl knew tolerably well that things was come to a climax. She'd refused Alfred twice by then, but he thought nothing of that, being well aware that her father wished him to have her, and knowing that Ben's word was law where his own might be concerned.

Jacob Newte, the ferryman, rowed father and daughter over when Sunday came, and Ben stepped on to the rowboat as if he was the captain of a man-o'-war coming aboard his battleship, and gave Jacob "Good afternoon" in his lordly way.

"I hope you do well, my good fellow," said Ben, for he was comfortable after his Sunday dinner, and when he was comfortable he'd patronize all lesser creatures than himself, which meant the rest of the human species.

And Jacob, a big, fine built, fair chap, with flaxen, curly hair and blue eyes, thanked Mr. Pascoe most humble, and said he was never better. He pulled 'em across the river with strong strokes, and handed 'em out; and after Ben was gone forward, like Julius Caesar landing on Great Britain, the man squeezed Christie's hand and slipped a bit of paper in it.

For, you see, unbeknownst to anybody

else on earth, they was tokened and living for each other.

Jacob Newte was off again in half a minute to Thorpe-Michael, to fetch over some holiday people, and Christie peeped in the letter, and what she read made her a thought fearful, seeing the afternoon's work afore her.

But there was Pritchard in his Sunday best to welcome 'em, and his sister, Mrs. Moon, also; and presently, after a wondrous fine meal, Alfred took the girl away to see his poultry, and Ben lit his pipe and graciously poured out his wisdom for Clara Moon.

She was a comely woman with plenty of character, and she listened and said naught, while Pascoe explained that he thought highly of her brother, and would sanction an alliance between the families.

III

AND meantime Alfred went for Christie, and gave it as his opinion they were created for each other.

"I won't hear 'no' again," he said. "I've been a soldier, remember, and soldiers ain't going to take 'no' for an answer, my dear."

Then he hinted at her father's liking for him, and said he felt very sure all things would work together for good.

That amused Christie, for she was quick to see a joke, but the fleeting smile on her pretty mouth weren't for Alfred.

"I hope all things will work together for good, Mr. Pritchard," she said, "but, to tell the truth, they don't look as if they were going to."

"And why for not?" he asked. "You won't find a better than me on your side of the river, nor yet on mine."

"I'm sure I shan't," she answered him. "But it ain't a question of goodness, nor yet of badness, but a question of love. I couldn't marry nobody if I didn't love him, could I? I'm sure you'd be the last to wish such a thing."

"And why the devil don't you love me, knowing how well I love you?" he asked.

And she smiled again—just a twinkle with her eyes this time.

"I couldn't tell you why I don't," she said, "but the reason might be I love somebody else, and none's got the right to love two."

"Somebody else?" he asked. "Who else is there that your father would look

at? He wills for you to marry me, well knowing you'd be safe and happy to the end of your days if you done so."

"I know," answered Christie; "that's why I said it didn't look much as if all things was working together for good."

Alfred Pritchard was very angry about it, and showed a bit of the cloven hoof; but she took his temper so calm as you please and never loved him less than at this moment.

"Now you'd best to show me your famous Golden Wyandottes," Christie suggested, "and change the subject."

"Blast the Wyandottes," he retorted. "You're playing with me, and no honest man likes that. And I warn you, you'll be up against it, because Mr. Pascoe ain't one very well used to having his will crossed. And no more ain't I."

But nobody ever saw Christie in a flare. She agreed with Alfred there.

"I'm sorry for you both," she said.

"And I could very near be sorry for the fool who thinks to get you from your parent," he replied. "Poor speed he'll have, and the man who's talked you into this nonsense can count to reckon with me, so well as Mr. Pascoe."

"Poor chap, can he?" asked Christie.

"Yes, he can, and I'd like to know the name of the damned sweep this instant moment," Alfred answered.

"Why be rude?" she asked very patiently. "He isn't damned, and he isn't a sweep—he's an open-air man; and, as it happens, he's going to come in to-night, after supper, with the great news. So my father shall hear about him first, if you please."

"And what 'll your father say when he finds you've turned me down for a plow-boy, or a hedge-tacker?"

"That I can't tell you, Mr. Pritchard, till after I know."

"If you can't tell me, I'll tell you, Christie Pascoe. He'll say that his mind's made up, and that you'll marry me, or nobody. That's what he'll say."

"I hope not, Alfred; but very like he will."

"And what then?"

"In that case I'm afraid he'll have to unmake his mind again. But he haven't said it yet; and now, if I ban't to see the Wyandottes, I'll go back to father."

"Go back to hell," he swore to himself, but not for her ear. He was a short-tempered man, and he felt terrible disappoint-

ed and astonished at this third refusal; but it only made him more determined than ever to get her.

Then they returned, and Ben, who was prepared to bless them in his grand way, mighty soon saw by Alfred's face there was nothing to bless about.

IV

Two minutes later Christie rang the ferry bell, but her father spoke never a word. The storm was rising, however, as she saw by his nostrils. Then Newte rowed over for 'em and took 'em back in silence, and not till they was inside their own gate did her father ask Christie where they stood.

She told him, and he spoke as if he was God talking to a grasshopper.

"I thought, you fond creature, as I'd made myself clear?" he said.

"You did," she answered, "and I'd have liked to pleasure you; but I love another man, father. I don't love Mr. Pritchard. In fact, I don't even like him. He uses ugly words when he's vexed. And he ain't so brave as you'd think, either. He wants to marry me, and he trusts to you to help him to do so. To hear him you'd think you was going to be his side against your own child. But you never would marry me to a man I don't love, would you?"

"Obedience is far greater than love," he replied, "and when a person of my stature finds the right fashion of husband for his only daughter, she'll make a hugeous mistake to put up any opposition. In fact, it's beyond my power to imagine such a thing. You say you've dared to love another man. If you do, you've disobeyed me, Christie, and I hope you'll ask your Maker to forgive you on your knees for such a fearful thing. I have spoken, and when I speak it's the last word. I will and intend for you to wed Alfred Pritchard, and the love will quickly follow, if you're the pattern of daughter I've been used to think. Love me, love the man of my choice, and keep right with your father and your Creator both."

Of course, she knew there was no arguing with a father who could talk like that. They went to evening worship presently, and Ben carried the bag round in his usual condescending way. And, after supper, when her father was about to clinch the matter and bid the girl to take Alfred in twenty-four hours, or reap the consequences here and hereafter, there fell a knock on

the door, and young Newte appeared, hat in hand and broadcloth on his back.

"And what might you want, Jacob Newte, and why do you choose the evening of the Lord's Day to come before me?"

That's how Ben met him, and looked over the top of his glasses with a mixture of scorn and pity, as if the ferryman only lived by his permission.

And Jacob, little guessing what was in the wind that evening, made answer pleasant like.

"I want your greatest treasure, Mr. Pascoe, and I thought the better the day, the better the deed."

But there wasn't no lightness in Ben's mind, and he hated anybody with a saucy touch, so the ferryman got a bad start, and he was quickly in a poor plight. Jacob Newte, however, belonged to the new generation; he had a good nerve and a command of temper; and he very soon needed both.

When Ben heard the fatal news, that the chap wanted to wed Christie, his eyes bulged and his head rolled round on his neck. He snorted, like a river horse, and he seemed to swell and expand afore their eyes.

"You!" cried Ben, booming like a bell. "You—a starveling ferryman—to offer for Miss Pascoe. And the Lord's Day and all! Do I hear you?"

"I hope so," replied Jacob. "Anyway, I hear you all right, Mr. Pascoe. And it's just as you say—all but the 'starveling.' I wouldn't have let myself fall in love with any maid if I was a starveling, I do assure you, sir. And I was coming to that."

Then Christie cut in.

"Jacob's got one hundred and fifty pounds saved, father," she said, "and they fetch him eight pounds a year. And he hopes he'll have two hundred to goody by Christmas. He's doing amazing well, and be very highly thought on, and he's took prizes for his honey and rabbits three year running, as you know. And he's his old Uncle Ted's right hand, and can look for useful money in that quarter when Mr. Newte goes home."

"All of which be true, but wouldn't matter if me and Christie didn't love each other with all our hearts, Mr. Pascoe," added Jacob.

Ben panted and goggled at him, and rolled his big, round eyes to the ceiling. And then he spoke.

"'Tis well known, you bowldacious youth, that the Lord loveth those whom He chasteneth," he asserted. "'Tis a commonplace that it is so; and that's why, no doubt, I be called to suffer this shameful affair to-night. I forgive you, Jacob Newte—remember that. I forgive you, because you know not what you doeth. The likes of you be dead to common decency and reality and the very nature of things; else you daren't rush in where angels fear to tread."

"I wouldn't say that, father," Christie suggested. "Because Mr. Pritchard rushed in for the third time of asking only a few hours ago. And if he can rush in, why not Jacob? The men will rush in when they fall in love."

"I wouldn't rush nobody," declared the ferryman. "But love be love, and knows no fear, Mr. Pascoe."

V

THE young people were cool as cucumbers, and behaved so civil as need be.

Ben, he snorted at 'em again, and looked upwards as if he expected a bolt from the sky, and couldn't understand why it didn't fall. And then he turned to his daughter.

"When you say 'Alfred Pritchard,' you say the last word," he announced. "'Tis for me, and not for you, to plan your future. And, God willing, I have done so. Use what little sense you've got left, Christie, if you please, and look forward. Pritchard is a man who has won his battle and stands in a firm position. I've read his character, as I read all characters, and I approve of him. I've gone so far as to tell him that I can look upon him as the husband of my only child. And shall you, or any other person on earth, come between me and my word? You bring before me a raw lad—"

"Twenty-five, Mr. Pascoe," said Jacob.

"A raw lad, I say, unproved, unknown—honest, for all I can tell to the contrary, but a cipher. Shall it be said that any son-in-law of mine is a cipher?"

"I'm straight, and well thought of, Mr. Pascoe," said Jacob patiently. "I'm no more a cipher than any other young man. You say Alf Pritchard, the publican. Well, I haven't got no quarrel against Alf, but I'm open to bet that when I'm so old as him, I'll be so strong as him. I'd take Alfred on to-morrow at anything from drawing a cork to benching a bird. And as to

his winning his battle, if he tells true, he won all the battles in the war—till the Germans caught him."

That put the lid on, because if there was one thing Ben hated more than another, 'twas a joke.

He rose up and waved his arm to the door in his lordly way.

"Go!" he said. "Depart out of this house, Jacob Newte, and see my face no more. I deny you and I forbid you, and I don't want you, or any man, to imagine that my word has ceased to be law under my own roof-tree. When you've proved yourself worthy to black the boots of Alfred Pritchard, or any other responsible man, it will be time for you to think of marrying, and not sooner. As for my daughter, Miss Pascoe, she weds with my intended son-in-law when I choose for the nuptials to take place. And I dare you—I dare you, Newte—ever to lift your eyes to her again, in public or yet in private. Now, go in peace—a forgiven man."

"I hate to worry you, dear father," Christie interposed, "but there's a thought more to it than that. Such a good father you've always been, too. But I will never marry Mr. Pritchard, father."

"That is a matter between me and your Maker," replied Ben. "And since the Almighty has seen eye to eye with me for sixty years, it's little likely we shall differ about my only child."

"Then I'll say 'good night,' and hope to convince you in fullness of time, Mr. Pascoe," spoke up Jacob.

And Christie did a most daring thing, for she went up to the young man and said:

"You will convince dear father, Jacob, because he's a man of great reasoning powers, and the cleverest in Thorpe-Michael."

Then she kissed the chap!

He bolted after that, and Christie made to kiss her father also; but he was a good bit vexed by now, and bade her go to bed and call on the Lord to forgive a wicked day's work.

In fact, from that hour forward Christie found her life a thought trying with Ben, and the way she took it—steadfast and quiet and peaceful—made her father worse instead of better.

And months passed, and he grew more determined than ever, and tried to find them who would speak a bad word concerning Jacob. But none could do so.

And Alfred, t'other side of the river, did

his best also, and when he heard who the rival was, he set out to hurt Newte where he might, and started another ferryboat against him.

And all the time Jacob and Christie went their way quite openly, because when Ben dared her to see the young man again, she answered, plain and straight, that though a sorrow to cross such a wonderful father, yet she loved Jacob, and felt that he couldn't be cut out of her life no more.

And then old Ted Newte, a man very near so well to do as Ben himself, though none guessed it, met Mr. Pascoe and praised Jacob Newte to his face, and asked him why the mischief he wanted to put his oar in and make needless trouble between lovers.

Old Ted had a power of crooked words, and used 'em, and Ben's lofty way didn't frighten him nor yet silence him. Pascoe waved the old boy aside, and told him that he'd pray for Ted to be forgiven his language when he went before his Maker, which would be soon; but the ancient man made answer:

"Pray for yourself, you silly frog. And pray for a little less side and a little more common sense."

Of course Ben forgave him, and also hoped that his God would; but that only made the breach wider.

VI

AND then came the crashing affair of the Golden Wyandottes.

You see, Jacob was a mighty clever fellow under his quiet, cheerful ways, and he looked ahead and saw that he had got two long pulls over Pritchard at his best. He'd got youth, and he'd also got Christie. And she was very clever, too—none cleverer—and between them they very soon planned a campaign.

Jacob dropped the ferry, and Ben and Alfred, behind the scenes, felt as they'd drove him off the river, and they'd soon show the world the truth about him. But in reality Newte took up what was better, and got a useful bit of money from his uncle and put it to good purpose. He started poultry in a small way, but with a far-reaching plot behind.

He showed next winter, but only succeeded with his honey and rabbits; and Alfred Pritchard crowed, because in the poultry Jacob failed. But it was noticed that Golden Wyandottes was what Newte

had taken up, and the people laughed a bit at his cheek—to tackle the publican on his strongest point, so to say. Then time passed, and a year was gone, and another half; and there came round the big Dartmouth Poultry Show once more.

Meantime it weren't a very happy home for Christie Pascoe, nor yet her father, for she was obstinate and patient, and he was obstinate and fierce; and the more she withstood him, the more determined felt the man that Heaven was on his side. And there came a night when, for once, Christie's patience failed her, and she said a very dangerous thing in a moment of vexation, as a girl will.

They sparred as they too often did, and presently the talk ran on Alfred Pritchard, and Ben reminded her how he was going to win the famous silver cup outright at Dartmouth in a fortnight.

"He's took it twice with some of the best birds ever reared in Devon," said Ben, "and now he'll win it for good and all. And that's just an example of the fine quality of the man—thorough and forthright. And why you can withstand me, knowing right well that you must come to your duty sooner or later, I often ask at the Throne."

But she knew about the show, and she knew that this year Jacob's Golden Wyandottes were a sight better than Alfred's. 'Twas a dead secret, but no doubt whatever existed, for Jacob, with patience and study, had got to know all that there was to it, and luck was with him, and he'd bred some very unusual good birds. He understood the points, and a pal of his, also a fancier, had told Newte he'd show better Wyandottes this time than Alfred.

'Twas a dead secret, but, as it happened, Christie used it now, and, much to his astonishment, contradicted her father. And he was a good bit surprised at her tone of voice, also, for once in a way she showed temper; and he was quick to feel that a weakness in her. And when she saw what she'd done, and felt sorry, that was too late.

"Well, he just won't get the cup, then," said Christie.

"I should much like to know who'll beat him," her father retorted, "and I'll take leave to say that he will win the cup; and what I say generally happens, I believe."

"And what I say shall happen, too," she declared. "He won't win the cup—he won't, he won't, and he won't. And I'll marry the man that does—that I promise!"

He took her up pretty sharp, you may be sure.

"You pride yourself on never telling a lie," he said. "So think what you're doing. Do you mean them words?"

"Every one of 'em," she answered. "If Alfred wins the cup for Golden Wyandottes, I'll take him. And you can tell him so if you mind to."

"I wili," said Ben. "Afore God you've spoken—afore God and your parent—and if you do back now, the Lord's Hand will lie heavy on you, Christie Pascoe."

Well, she felt she'd made a fool of herself and gone a bit far, no doubt; but she'd heard the expert men say that Jacob's pair of birds was points better than Alfred's, and she didn't fear much about it. She told Jacob, however, and he chided her, for he was a modest chap, and though so sure as could be that he'd got Alfred settled this time, yet felt Christie's speech a source of danger, and was sorry the maiden had opened her mouth so wide.

He had other troubles for the minute, because in that late autumn time his Uncle Ted was took with bronchitis, and needed close watching of a night, and Jacob often sat up with him through the small hours, when the old blade suffered most. But the young man looked terrible sharp after his birds when he'd heard Christie, because he knew very well that Ben and Pritchard would take her at her word.

Not for a moment did he think his sweetheart's father would do anything devious in such a matter, because, though a blower by nature, and a terrible puffed up sort of character, yet Mr. Pascoe was never known to be caught out in a doubtful deed. But Jacob had heard a whisper once or twice against Alfred, and so he took no chances and fetched his two champion chickens inside his dwelling house of a night.

Meantime, of course, Ben had told the news to the publican, in high good spirits.

"A lie she could never tell, being my own daughter," said he, "and there's many a true word spoke in jest, and she's given herself into our hands in my opinion."

Alfred, however, saw a good bit more in it than what his would-be father-in-law did.

"It 'll want some thinking on," he answered, "for this reason: it may be true that I ain't going to win. And, of course, you see what this means. It means that Christie has heard, from them that know, that there are tiptop birds coming against

me this year; and since she wouldn't care a button about any birds but Jacob Newte's, that's where the danger lies."

"Surely, with all your fowl-runs and your great fame at 'em, you've got a brace of Wyandottes to beat anything a small man like him would show," Ben suggested, and Alfred thought a minute and eyed him down.

But he didn't tell what was in his mind, and answered that no doubt it was so.

"Of course I have a score better than his best," he said. "'Tis a vain silly boast on Newte's part, to be sure, but I'm glad to hear tell about it, because, though anxious to get the cup outright, that's naught to Christie. I wanted to win before, but now I will win, and if the man had the pick of all the poultry in Devonshire, I'd beat him."

"Well, mind you do. I look to you," Ben remarked. "Chickens ain't one of my subjects, because I've always moved among higher things, but you're up in the creatures. And 'tis Christie and cup, or else disgrace, so I hope you'll leave nothing to chance, Alfred, for if you was to fail now, I should feel I'd misjudged you a good bit—a thing I've never been known to do."

"I'll leave nothing to chance, be sure," replied the publican.

VII

THEN Ben got back to his own side of the water, and Alfred felt he was up against it. But he had a week yet, and he was an energetic fashion of man when his own interests faced him.

He asked Mrs. Moon a question over his tea that night, and she didn't leave no doubt of the answer.

"What's this rigmarole I'm hearing that there's birds in Thorpe-Michael going to put me out of the cup?" he asked. "I've trusted to you, Clara, as I always do trust to you in that matter."

"I know," she said. She was a calm woman, and didn't like her brother very much, but bided with him for her own convenience. "I know you leave 'em to me, Alfred, and I haven't heard as you was a loser by so doing. But you can't have it your own way every time. You'll win the cup outright next year, I dare say, for you've only got to win it once more; but you won't win it this year—else Ford and Bates be liars."

She named a proper fowl-master in Ford,

and when she mentioned me—Bates—she also named an expert, for I've always made the birds a hobby in my spare time, and judged 'em at the shows for many years.

"You mean," asked Pritchard, "that somebody's going to beat my Golden Wyandottes at Dartmouth next week?"

"I do mean that," answered Mrs. Moon. "I haven't seen no better birds than yours, myself, but those men have, and they know."

"Well, we'll see," he replied. "For my part, empty talk don't cut no ice with me. I won't ax you to tell me who the winner's going to be. I don't want to know, but I may have a surprise for him yet. And don't you let no more fanciers see my fowls, please. 'Tis time enough for them to see 'em when they're on public view at the show."

So there it was, and Mrs. Moon answered naught, yet knowing Alfred better than most, wondered what he'd be up to. She didn't know, of course, how his fate hung on the matter. But, anyhow, he came down full of business the next day, and said he must get to town the morning following; and to London he did go, sure enough, and was from home no less than three days.

Mystery followed on mystery, then. Alfred came home by night very late after his jaunt, and the Orchards was closed, and his sister gone to bed when he did so. But next morning, going to the chickens, Mrs. Moon heard a cluck in a little empty fowl house, and looked in and saw two of the grandest Golden Wyandottes that even her practiced eyes had ever seen.

They was kings among such birds, and she well knew at a glance that no such fowls would be seen at Dartmouth Show, or anywhere else nearer than London. They were hungry as hunters, and she fed 'em of the best, and then went in to breakfast. And there was Alfred, pleased as punch with himself, and none the worse for his adventures, seemingly.

Of course Clara Moon saw his game, but left him to tell it.

"Wherever did you come across that pair of marvelous birds?" she asked, pouring his tea. "I didn't know there was such Wyandottes out of a dream."

"Then you ought to," he replied, bold as brass. "Because you bred 'em. That's the pair I've chosen to show out of my little lot; and if there's better over the water, or

anywheres else in these parts, then I'll say good-by to the cup with a good appetite."

She laughed, but said naught.

"And on your life, don't you let any man or woman see 'em," he bade her, and she promised she would not.

"Least said soonest mended," she told Alfred. "Have you hid the box you brought 'em in?"

He winked his wicked eye.

"Don't you worry," he answered. "You look after our prize birds and keep your mouth shut. I'm very proud of they Wyandottes, and proud of you for breeding 'em; and this I'll say, the cup's yours, Clara—a present from a loving brother."

"'Twould look very handsome in the bar parlor," said Mrs. Moon.

VIII

'Twas like a theater drama, you may say; and the next thing that happened fell out at Thorpe-Michael, for Jacob, coming home to his dinner, found a note left for him by Christie, very short and terrible mysterious.

Two days later, that was, and it ran like this:

I be keeping away from you for reasons. And you mind to sit up with your Uncle Ted all to-morrow night. And let others know you have done so. A lot hangs to it. C. P.

Jacob scratched his head, and couldn't guess from Adam what 'twas all about, but he hadn't seen Christie for three days, and he was glad to know she'd bided away for good reasons. And he done what she said, and watched old Mr. Newte all the following night. And next morning it was that the huckster came round for Jacob's birds, to be took with a good few others to the Dartmouth Show, which opened on the following day.

And Jacob made over his brave pair to the man, with good hopes that he was going to be a conqueror and give Pritchard the go-by for once.

But meantime a shocking affair happened at Dittany, and when Alfred came down house to breakfast, dressed for Dartmouth, because he meant taking his birds in himself, Mrs. Moon had a nasty jar waiting for the man. Of course he'd took a lot of trouble and spent a tidy sum of money over his wickedness, and no doubt he felt a good bit disappointed to hear his sister's news.

"Cruel sorry to say that thieves have

broke in, Alf," she told him, calm as usual. "There was burglars in the fowl-house last night, and the prize birds be gone. Naught else, but only them two."

He flared and rushed out, but there weren't nothing to be done about it. All was as usual, except the empty cage, where the two champion birds was stored alone.

"What man did you tell?" he roared, turning upon Clara, red with passion.

"Me?" she asked. "You bade me not to tell. I swear to God I told no man."

"Then somebody else did," he declared. "News of them Wyandottes got to Jacob Newte—that I'll swear—and I'll have him by the heels afore noon."

"Why Newte?" she asked. "What be your fowls to him?"

"Because," he answered, "'tis his blasted birds that was going to beat mine."

She shook her head.

"All this be too deep for me," said Mrs. Moon. "But I'd go to the police station if I was you, and tell 'em who you think the rogue must be."

And Alfred went and charged Jacob Newte with the robbery. But, he heard later, that Jacob had spent the night along with his sick uncle and couldn't throw no light upon it at all. And the police refused to lock Jacob up, and weren't none too worried about Pritchard's loss, neither, because they didn't like him, and there was a suspicion against him about smuggling from Guernsey, six months before, though nothing proved.

IX

AND the next scene of the drama was that Jacob Newte's Golden Wyandottes won the cup, and Alfred's home-grown pair was only third. And then there came in Mrs. Moon one morning, full of good cheer to her brother, to say that the prize Wyandottes from London was back again, and none the worse for their secret wanderings.

You see, though not lacking in craft, as Alfred's sister was likely to be, Clara Moon happened to be an honest woman. She knew all about Christie and Jacob, and she wasn't going to see Newte choused out of the cup by a fraud. So she had a quiet tell with his sweetheart about what was going to happen, and Christie, quick as lightning, saw the way to work.

First she took care to keep Jacob in the dark and out of danger, and then she told a young fisherman friend or two how it was

going to be, and they were fearless blades, and didn't harbor no particular admiration for Alfred, so they acted according. And there's little question but that Mrs. Moon helped 'em. But the details were always wrapped in mystery, and no doubt 'twas better so.

The facts, however, crept out, as such things will, and it got to be pretty well known that the publican at the Orchards had tried to do a very doubtful deed. Nobody ever charged him to his face, but rumor was terrible busy, and, taking one thing with another, Pritchard ordained to leave Dittany and go up country six months later to where they knew less of him.

He didn't take Mrs. Moon, however. He wedded a widow with a bit of cash, who believed in him, and his sister went to a Dartmouth man, to keep his house.

X

As for Mr. Pascoe, he took a very high line, and went so far to admit publicly that, for the first and last time in his life, he'd been deceived in a fellow creature.

And then Jacob Newte, with the cunning of the serpent, rented half an acre of land, and ventured to come before Mr. Pascoe and ask for the benefit of his world-famous knowledge of small fruits. And Ben let him have it, and Jacob followed his instructions to the letter.

And when old Ted Newte went home, a year later, and left Jacob a clear two hundred a year, Ben saw an eye to eye with God Almighty once more, and let his daughter take the man. Of course, he done it as only he could. He had Jacob come to sup, and when the meal was finished, he spoke to 'em.

"'Tis pretty well known," he began, "that what I speak to-day the world says to-morrow. And I may tell you, Jacob Newte, that I've chosen you to be my son-in-law and the husband of my only child. And my commands in this matter must be done, for I'll take no opposition."

"Fear nothing, dear father," answered Christie. "'Tis very well known by Jacob and me that your will is law, and you'll never find either of us want to cross it."

TO YOU, DIVORCED

My love lies dead beneath a little hill,
And yours still walks,
And laughs a bit and smiles and talks
To whom she will.

While you stay separate, apart, from her,
Knowing she lives,
Knowing that warming life still gives
Her white hands stir.

Those hands! You pressed them light as you met
The other day—
A casual pressure. Love, they say,
Can soon forget.

And I, who'd give this weary world to press
Her hand, denied,
Can know no joy—while you, in pride,
Scorn happiness.

Ah, yes, *your* love still lives. Her lips are red,
Nor do you care.
I watch you, jealous with despair.
My love lies dead!

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift

Violets in a Dim Wood

HESTER, WITH THE COOL CONSCIENCE OF MIDDLE AGE, SAVES
LYDIA, WHOSE HEART WAS HOT WITH YOUTH

By Elizabeth Burgess Hughes

THERE always was confusion at the Cresston family's supper time. Lem, husband and father, stalked in, scattering suggestions, exploiting himself; full of: "So I says to him," and "Well, now, I'll tell you what I think about it."

There was Bob, the son, slim, with his sleek, dark hair, and his slangy chatter of girls.

Leda, the nineteen-year-old daughter, blond, put on many airs and coquettings, even toward her father.

Everybody demanded things at once, with interruptions and exclamations.

The Cresstons never had a maid. If Hester had said she wanted one, her husband would have been greatly astonished.

"Are you sick, Hes'? Ain't you feeling able to do your work?" would have been the tenor of his response.

Hester was bringing the hot food from the kitchen—a roast, vegetables, coffee. Lem always wanted his coffee with his dinner—"a man-size cup, old lady; none o' this here demi-tasse foolishness for me!"

The dessert to-night would be ice cream, out of deference to company. Lem's cousin, Lizzie Brayles; and his sister Nan and her husband, and their boarder, Mr. Lawson, were guests. Nan explained that she knew Hester would be glad to have Mr. Lawson along; he was so genteel.

Nan, robust and bristling, was like her brother, full of herself. Her husband was enough like her to be her twin. But Mr. Lawson was little and apologetic. He looked as if he might have an inferiority complex.

"The roast's overdone," complained Hester's son, fastidiously, with his fretful, almost feminine accent, smoothing back his hair with one hand—a frequent gesture with him. "You know I like it rare, Mums."

"I'm sorry," murmured Hester.

"You needn't be," roared Lem. "I don't want no raw meat on my table, young man! Have some of the peas, Nannie? See here, Mr. Lawson, ain't nobody at all looking after you? Pass Mr. Lawson the potatoes, Hes'."

She obeyed mechanically. Her thoughts were very far away.

Spring was in the air. Spring! Jonquils were blooming in the front yard. They made Hester think of a thousand thousand things: of youth and beauty and warm twilight—Of young love and the thrill of a first kiss—

She was forty-seven to-day.

"Oh, mother, why couldn't we have one of those ducky new salads—nuts and fruit and gelatin; you know? I'm so sick of cole slaw and plain lettuce."

"I was so busy to-day, Leda," Hester explained, apologetically. "I had to work on your blue dress—"

"More hot bread, mother!" her husband called out.

Scents of syringa and lilac—Roses blooming beside an old gray stone wall—A great red sun dropping on the hills, reflected in the deep quiet waters of a lake—

"Ain't these canned peas?" Nan queried, with that peculiar lack of breeding that characterized Lem's folks. "They's fresh in the market now, Hes'."

"I know. But I didn't have time to go after them. I wasn't well Monday, and that threw the washing late. I had to iron out a few pieces this morning—"

"What's this son of yours for? Dawdling round here day after day! Why didn't you go to market for your mother?" Lem demanded.

Bob was sulkily silent.

"He was out in his fliv with Betty Put-

nam all morning," Leda contributed, smartly.

"Nice occupation for a strapping fellow like you, riding flappers round town, burning up gas—"

"You 'tend to your own knitting, Lede!" the boy snapped, turning red.

"Why didn't *you* go?" little Mr. Lawson asked, unexpectedly, turning to Leda. "You haven't much to do, I take it."

"Not much—oh, no!" She laughed at him, prettily reproachful. "Just piano practice, and getting ready for the amateurs' play Friday, and sending out invitations to my party next week. I guess that isn't keeping busy—oh, no!"

"Party!" boomed Lem. "We're having too many parties, young woman. You give one not a month ago."

"Oh, that was just a little surprise social, dad. This one's different. It's to be in honor of Sally Peterson, that rich girl who's visiting Alice. I can't let her think we're a bunch of yaps."

Lem Cresston considered. "Peterson—old Bill Peterson's girl from Kildare?"

"Yes."

"Good land, that fellow's got more money 'n he knows what to do with. If you got to run round with girls, Bob, why'n't you choose one that's likely to inherit?"

Guffaws followed from Lem at his own wit.

Oh, her own youth—the youth she had never had! The romance that had passed her by—

"Mr. Lawson will have some more potatoes, mother," Lem prompted her. "He's spoke to you twice."

"Oh, please excuse me!"

II

ROMANCE—the thing she had never really had— The thing that every woman wants— She had been a penniless orphan, and Lem was a "good catch." A steady, honest, dependable fellow.

Her relatives thought she "did well to get him," and told her so. Perhaps Lem thought so, too.

But once a handsome young man had stayed for a week under their roof. He was a real estate man, who thought their town might be a good place in which to locate a new hotel.

That was when she and Lem had been married five years. Lem wasn't averse to taking roomers and boarders, for they

dropped a few more dollars into the family exchequer.

A brown-eyed young man— Even now he was the sun that gave color to the dark planet that was her soul.

"Mother, did you finish my dress? You know it has to be ready by Friday, noon. Are you sure you got just the right shade of blue for those ribbon roses?"

Only yesterday she had seen a stranger walk into the post office that might have been he—after twenty-five years— But, then, she was always seeing *him* in every good-looking stranger.

She pictured in her mind a darkened room, the odor of flowers in the air, a man with lovable eyes and a warm mouth—

Crêpe de Chine clothes and perfume.

The chatter went on. Lem was teasing the young folks.

"When you get as old as me and mother—"

In her soul she was beautiful and young! In her dreams she was Lilith.

"Well, if I was Peter Grove—"

"In my opinion"—this from Nan—"she's acting the hussy!"

Instantly, Hester's attention was arrested. They were talking about little Lydia Grove, of course. Lydia was being "talked about."

The man whose name was coupled with hers was from the adjoining township—a man Hester liked because something about him, his smile, his gentle manner, perhaps, reminded her of her lost dreams.

"I always make jelly out of my apple parings—"

"He says butter's bringing a higher price over in Mosby than what it is here."

"Them cattle ain't a patching to Sam Bolin's—brought 'em from Texas—"

Then back to Lydia Grove again, because Nan's acid tongue would not leave her alone.

"Well, a man that *is* a man ain't going to make love to somebody else's wife." This from Nan's husband.

"Low skunk," Lem pronounced. "Now, if a fellow gets to fooling round mother—"

There were loud roars of laughter at this brilliant witticism.

Hester brought in the ice cream.

Cousin Lizzie's protuberant eyes surveyed it greedily. "Did you make it yourself, Hester?"

"No. It came from the soda fountain at the drug store."

"You don't say! I always make mine at home. It's cheaper."

Lem apologized: "I'm ashamed of serving my company cream brought in from outside. A body never knows what they put in it, and they always want so much for it. But seems like Hes' is slowing down, getting behindhand with her work lately. Or getting lazy, maybe."

He pinched her arm with cumbersome playfulness as she passed his chair.

Hester drew away carefully. He'd make her spill something, she complained.

After the stacks of dishes had been dried, and the kitchen put in order—the women guests offered to help, but Hester pleaded that she worked better alone, so they all went out to the front porch—she stood washing her hands at the sink.

"Say, Mums." Bob approached hurriedly, his oiled hair shining blackly like patent leather in the light. "Lend me a fiver, won't you?"

"A fiver? But I don't know as I've got it to spare, son. What do you want it for?"

"For spending money. I never have any like the other fellows, and paw's so damned stingy—"

"Now, Bobby."

"Well, confound it all, why can't I be like the rest? Jerry Haskins spends more in one day 'n I do in a month. I'm tired of being thought a cheap skate."

"I have so little money, dear. I need a new hat—"

"You got a hat plenty good enough. Well, do I get it, or not?"

There was an ominous flash in his blue eyes. She recognized the storm signals. She was afraid of his temper. After all, his happiness meant more to her than mere money.

"I'll get it for you dear; just a minute."

She hurried from the room.

His face cleared a trifle, but he was still sulky from remembering how much more Jerry Haskins had than he.

If only he had put his arm round her—laid his smooth young cheek close to hers—told her she was a dear—thanked her.

But Bob took his mother for granted. He always had.

On the way downstairs with her last five dollars, earned by sewing for a neighbor, she met Leda searching for her.

"Oh, mother, Addie's just phoned they're having a little social at her house

to-night—sort of impromptu. Could you press out my maize organdie?"

"Can't you do it this time, daughter? I'm awfully tired, somehow."

"Oh, now, mother, you know I'd never do it right, and I'd look a frump. I haven't nearly as many clothes as the other girls, and if I have to look tacky in what I've got—"

"Oh, all right, dear, I'll press it. Tell your Aunt Nan and the others I'll be out in a minute."

Leda did not offer to go after the maize organdie. Hester wearily climbed the steps to the girl's room and brought it down to the kitchen. After it was finished she went in and sat with Lem's relatives until they left. They had been talking of Lydia Grove again, saying terrible things—things that cut into Hester's soul.

III

WHEN they had gone, Lem picked up his shoes—he just *would* sit in his stocking feet, no matter who came to the house—and announced that he was going to bed.

"Better come along, mother. It's all right for the young folks to run round nights, but old-timers like me and you got to have our sleep. Your supper wasn't as good as usual to-night. Didn't have no luck with your baking, did you?"

"Sometimes I don't," Hester replied absently, her thoughts vagrant.

"Well, you ain't the cook the Cresston women are, that's a fact. Nan's a plumb cat at times—you know she will talk about folks. Like as not she'll tell that a body don't get enough to eat at Sister Hester's. I hate to have her—"

"Don't bother about it. You go on up, Lem. I'll be along presently."

When she heard his shoes drop beside the bed, she went out to the gate, where the honeysuckle bloomed, and stood looking up at the stars.

What a mess life was—always so different from one's planning— She adored the children—she had tried hard to bring them up right—and they'd been sweet when they were small. But now Lem was coming out in them—his lack of perception, his egoism, his selfishness.

Yet, in his way, he loved her—they all loved her; but she felt that the children would never be to her all that she had dreamed that they would be, when they were little and dependent.

The moon—big, golden, a far-away fairyland. Hester's eyes, as she looked up at it, were the eyes of seventeen—blue eyes, black lashed. She had a sweet, curved mouth.

A pretty woman—yes, she was that; but she didn't know it, nor apparently did any one else. The thick black hair was slicked back severely to be out of the way; her hands were work roughened. She wore an ugly gray print frock. But in Hester Cresston's eyes and mouth still lay an eternally beautiful and deathless dream.

They'd think she was crazy, but she wanted to get out into the moonlit night alone. She opened the gate very softly. She hoped Lem was asleep.

The long, white, curved road beckoned her as if, even yet, romance might lie at the end of it. *What might have been!*

Some vague conception of this stung her brain as she walked on through the flower-scented night. Love—beauty—fulfillment—perhaps she might have had them all.

But all she had had was Lem.

She stood to one side to let a great lumbering truck pass—one of the ugly, silence-shattering trucks of the furniture factory across the river, six miles away. Hester sometimes hated them; at other times she found them almost companionable. One could pretty nearly set one's clock by their schedule.

The noise of the hurrying van died away, and all was still again, except for the poignant night voices of crickets and katydids, with now and then the call of a nightingale. She looked out across the dark green world bathed in luminous light. Oh, God, how good it was to be alive—to tingle in response to beauty—on a night like this—if one loved and was loved.

A slight scuffle of leaves and branches sounded in the undergrowth by the road, and abruptly a slight figure, carrying a suit case, emerged from the short cut through the woods. Hester came face to face with Lydia Grove.

The two women stared at each other for an instant, then—

"Are you running away, Lydia?" Hester breathed.

Lydia threw up her head, angrily, and opened her lips to speak, then, seeing only friendliness in Hester's eyes, she began to cry.

"Yes, I am. I'm leaving Peter Grove. I hate him. He's a brute."

"But where are you going, dear?" in a low voice, gentler than before.

Lydia's dark head went down at that, and tears ran over her cheeks. She was a pretty, vivid little thing, not more than twenty-five, soft and sweet, yet with iron in her, too.

"Answer me, Lydia. Are you—going to Ben Chester? You needn't mind telling *me*. I understand."

"Yes!" Lydia answered, defiantly. "He's waiting for me at Forestville. I'm going to take the ten twenty train and meet him there. Then we're going to Chicago—maybe West, after that."

"Dear girl—you can't—"

"Don't try to persuade me! I'm past reason. I've made up my mind to go with the man I love." A sob intervened. "One of God's angels couldn't stop me now."

"Oh, but Lydia—your husband—"

"I hate him!"

"But you swore to be faithful to him at the altar."

"Not to him, but to what I thought he was. I never married the Peter Grove he is, anyway. He's a stranger to me, same as he was the week after I married him."

"But you *did* marry him."

"Because I didn't know what I was doing, and maw favored the match. I wasn't but eighteen, Mrs. Cresston. I didn't know the meaning of love. But I know *now*!"

"And you're sure of this—this other man?"

"As sure as that there's a God!" Lydia panted.

"You must love him greatly," Hester said.

"Love him? Oh, Mrs. Cresston, I love him so I feel sometimes as if his two hands were round my heart, squeezing it! I love him with all of heaven—and maybe a little hell, too—in my heart. My mouth goes dry if somebody speaks his name; when I hear his step my heart stops beating and my body turns cold. When he speaks I—I can't breathe for a minute! He fills the whole world. It's all light and loveliness with him, and darkness and misery without him. He loves me, too. He's a good man, truly he is, and tender. He wants to shield me from everything bitter, and make a new life for me. He says I've suffered enough. He wants me to see beauty as he sees it—for he says the world's full of it, and nobody ought to be unhappy."

"Hu-sh-h!" Hester's quick ear had

caught the sound of approaching footsteps. "Somebody's coming."

"Oh, my God!" breathed Lydia. "What if it's Peter? He may've missed me."

"Hide behind that big bush there," Hester commanded, rapidly, "and keep quiet as a mouse. He won't find you while I'm here."

IV

THE footsteps approached. A big, thick-necked man, wearing a soft blue shirt and corduroy trousers, with smoldering mean eyes, great pudgy hands, and an outthrust underlip, appeared from the bend in the road. Hester had time to observe his beligerent expression.

"How do **you** do, Mr. Grove?" she asked pleasantly.

He peered at her out of sullen, half shut eyes.

"Who are *you*?"

"Hester Cresston. Don't you recognize a neighbor?"

"Oh—Mis' Cresston!" His face cleared and turned apologetic. "Ain't you out pretty late all by yourself? Sick neighbor or something?"

"Some of my neighbors usually are sick," Hester affirmed, lightly. "Sometimes I wonder if this is a healthy neighborhood to live in."

"Oh, I reckon it's as good as the average. Ain't seen my wife anywhere round here, have you?"

"Your wife?" Hester repeated.

"Thought maybe she'd come up this road. Guess you'd have met her, though, if she had."

"Yes. How is she? I haven't seen Lydia right lately."

"Well, she ain't been herself for some time. Took to moping round, neglecting her housework. I aimed to bring her to her senses, but she got mad and 'lowed she'd leave—wouldn't stay under my roof! The idea of a respectable married woman carrying on like that. Bet *you* never cut no such shines! Young married women these days need a firm hand."

"Perhaps. Just how, I wonder, did you undertake to bring her to her senses?" Hester spoke gently, almost as if to herself. "Did you plead with her, tell her you loved her and needed her, beg her to stay?"

"*Me*? Well, I reckon not! If you want to know the truth"—grimly—"I took the buggy whip to her!"

"Oh, *no!*" Hester cried.

"You can't be too soft with women. You got to let 'em know who's boss! I won't stand no foolishness from Lydia. When she gets back to-night I'll scatter some of them highfaluting ideas of hers." His bulldog jaw shut until the lower line of it stood out.

He was in that state of anger where reticence is almost impossible. Obviously, he felt just now that he hated Lydia, and would have talked to any one he met in this same vein.

Moreover, Hester felt sure that he had been drinking. He was in a dangerous mood. His big thick fingers kept closing and unclosing, as if they longed to tighten on a whip as it descended on Lydia's frail, rebellious shoulders.

Hester was genuinely shocked.

"You're wrong—that's no way to manage a woman."

"It's the way I'll manage mine! Neglecting her work and running round with other men. No decent married woman ever carries another man's picture hid in a locket. Getting herself talked about. Why, a fellow over in town to-day asked me if I knew my wife's name was a common laughing stock. 'Why'n't you stop it, Grove?' says he. There, now, I reckon you didn't know that."

"Do you love her?" Hester interrupted, abruptly.

"I wouldn't 'a' married her if I hadn't liked her," he returned, sullenly. "She was a good girl, then. How'd I know she was going to turn out common? Well, I'll thrash this foolishness out of her, and she'll go back and settle down to her housekeeping and behave herself."

"But if she's bad, why don't you let her go? Why do you want her?"

"She's my *wife*, ain't she? And there's nobody else to do the work. She'd sort of got her hand in, and when she ain't mooning she's a right good worker."

"You can *hire* good workers."

"They come all-fired high, let me tell you! A woman's business is to 'tend to her house, and not go traipsing about neglecting it. If she does, somebody ought to show her where she gets off."

"Meaning—the man she has married. He owns her, of course."

"Sure, he owns her, and he's responsible for her actions. Lydia's young yet, and flighty; but when her spirit's broke she'll

come round and be all right; maybe as sensible as you are, Mis' Cresston. No nonsense about *you!* Bet you never trolloped round the country, and got yourself talked about with a man that wasn't your own husband!"

"Oh, no; of course not," Hester murmured, hurriedly.

Swift, poignant visions of violets in a dim April wood. A tall figure—a dark young face; a voice deep and tender—to her hungry soul as exquisite as a lyric strain of music. A voice slow and dear and thrilling. A man who would have made love to her if she hadn't recognized her duty to Lem Cresston.

Dreams—dreams.

"Well, I'll be getting along. I guess Lyd's back at the house by now. She ain't going to stay out long. She'd be afraid to, the little fool. But if you should happen on her on your way home—"

"Yes—if I should?"

"Tell her I been out looking for her. That 'll fetch her trotting."

V

WHEN Hester was quite sure that he had gone, she called to Lydia, very softly. The girl came out, trembling, chalk-faced.

"Oh, Mrs. Cresston, I can't go back to him—don't make me—I—I'd rather *die*, right here and now."

"Who's making you go back to him? It's ten o'clock—the courthouse clock just struck. You got twenty minutes to make the train. Here, give me that suit case. We'll have to be pretty brisk to make it."

"You—you don't mean— Oh, Mrs. Cresston!"

"Lydia, Lydia, I—I believe that *love is the only thing in the world that matters!* But I haven't had the courage to say so. Do you understand me?"

"Oh, yes—yes!"

"Then take it. Whatever happens, you can live on the memory of it afterward."

"Oh, Mrs. Cresston!"

They ran through the dark like fugitives, emerging on the station platform only a minute before the train pulled out. Because Mrs. Cresston, pillar of the community, was with her, little Mrs. Grove's going bore no aspect of flight, and created little comment among the few loungers at the depot.

"Good-by—and may God bless you!" Hester whispered, clasping Lydia's hand.

For an instant, as the girl's lifted eyes met hers, the curtains of glory parted, and Hester saw something almost too beautiful to bear.

"Oh, you're so good! I'll never forget it!" Lydia murmured, and stumbled into one of the day coaches, blinded by a sudden rush of tears.

Hester stood staring up at the windows. She must hurry home. Lem would wake, wonder where she was, be reproachful on her return. Somehow she didn't want to go home.

Love—love—love. Lydia was going toward love, out of shadow into streaming sunlight. What matter if love failed after awhile? For a time she would walk among the stars! For a time dreams would come true.

Why, even the ordinary daylight would be a glamorous enchantment! Earth would be all strange and golden, and every breath would be joyful. For a little while Lydia would be *immortal!*

The smell of honeysuckle came out of the deep dark aisles of the forest, drifting to her like some divine, haunting old poem. There would be jade-colored young ferns growing in the crannies of the rocks. And violets—violets in a dim wood—a blue tide of springtime under the high romantic moon. Spring—and love—and dreams.

The train whistled, and began to move.

And suddenly, with the sense of its going, the full force of her puritanical living arose in Hester Cresston in an overwhelming flood. Without warning, everything else was swept into the flood of it.

She ran along the platform, beside the gliding cars, screaming:

"Lydia! Come back! You mustn't go. Wait—wait! Oh, my God, what have I done? Come back! Come back! Lydia! Lydia!"

The train was gaining speed. In another moment Lydia would be gone. Hester dashed madly toward the steps, jerked herself up on them, and stood there, swaying dizzily with the motion of the train.

"I can't let her go—I can't," she sobbed, and staggered her way into the car where Lydia sat huddled into her seat, looking out into the moonlit night.

The two women stared at each other.

"Lydia, you must come back home! I was—crazy! I don't know what got into me. It isn't right—you promised Peter before God—"

And then a strange thing occurred. Lydia laughed—actually laughed—a hard, cruel, metallic little sound.

"It's too late now. Look at you, bare-headed, and your old shoes—you're a sight. Where did you think you were going?"

"I don't know. I just had to run after you. Oh, Lydia darling, there's comfort in sticking a thing out. You won't believe me, but God 'll be kind to you if you go back. Don't run away like this. It 'll ruin you—you can't ever come back here, where your mother and sisters are."

"I don't want to come back!"

"The next stop is Kildare, only twenty miles away. I know Jake Moore there—he's a friend of Lem's, and a good soul. He'll run us home in no time in his car, and nobody 'll ever know. Come, dear—promise me you'll go back."

"No," said Lydia, setting her soft lips into a firm line.

"Oh, please, Lydia! Please—"

"What changed you?" the younger woman asked, curiously.

"I don't know. When I saw the train pulling out, something seemed to snap in my brain and scream at me: '*Don't let her go!*' And I can't. Come back this time, child. Give Peter one more chance; and some day, maybe, fate 'll be kind to you, and you can go to Ben honorably."

"Why, you said yourself—"

"I know I did. But I got a—a feeling," persisted Hester. "I can't explain it. But you just *must* come back with me."

"He'll beat me."

"No, he won't. I'm going to take you to my Cousin Alice's. She's kind, and I'll make some sort of excuse so people won't talk. You can stay there to-night, and to-morrow I'll go see your husband myself. I'll try to make him understand that if he wants your love he'll have to win it. The way he's acting would drive any woman away."

"I don't want to go! You can't make me go!" Lydia cried, defiantly, throwing back her head. "I won't listen to you!"

VI

THE wills of the two women met and clashed. And because Hester was the older and wiser, she won.

"Just one more chance—give your husband just one more chance, dear. If he doesn't do better, then I won't ever again tell you you should stay. One—more—

chance. Lydia, quick! They're whistling for Kildare. You can send Ben a wire."

Crumpled and drooping, with sick eyes, Lydia finally said:

"Oh, hush nagging me. I'll go back. Oh, I wish I was dead! I hate Peter Grove."

Hester guided her as if Lydia were a woman just out of a hospital. The girl was trembling, shivering, breathing hard.

It was like an ugly dream, leaving the broken Lydia in the station while she ran to find Jake Moore—the swift run home in Jake's car—the leaving of Lydia at Cousin Alice's with a kiss and: "Now, you be brave, darling. I'll see you to-morrow."

Then, getting out at the post office, she walked six blocks so nobody would be sure which way she had come from. She walked slowly, because her knees trembled so. It appeared to her that she was ages reaching her house, because she felt queerly weak and spent.

Lem, coatless, hair ruffled, was standing with half a dozen excited neighbors at the gate in the moonlight. He was talking loudly and gesticulating.

Hester's heart ran up into her throat.

"Oh, what is it? The children—?" she cried.

"*Hester!* Where in tarnation have you been? The kids are all right. It's Peter Grove. Got killed awhile ago. Drinking, they say. One of them big trucks from the furniture factory ran over him. They're taking him home."

"It 'll be hard on Lyddy," somebody said, shrilly. "Reckon she'll find out now he wasn't such a bad fellow, as husbands go nowadays."

"Dead?" breathed Hester.

"Yes. Never knew what struck him, like as not. Guess I better go over, Hes', and see if I can be of any use. It 'd look unneighborly not to."

She nodded, and walked slowly into the house. The lamps weren't lighted, and she was glad, for she felt that her face would betray her.

Lem followed.

"The children are out looking for you. They got awful uneasy—you never stayed out this way before, mother. We got talking, and both of 'em cried. Bobby said to Lede that none of us appreciated you—that if anything happened to you, and you was took from us, we'd see mighty quick who mattered round here. Hes', I—" He

stood awkwardly twisting a button on his shirt. "I guess it's the Gospel truth. I sort of seemed to see it myself when they come with the news of Grove's death. What if the truck had killed *you*, too, I thought—and, before God, Hes', I felt like for a minute I'd go crazy!"

"Why, Lem!" Hester said, mildly.

VII

SHE lit the lamp. It showed him embarrassed, with misty eyes, suddenly and vaguely pathetic.

"You look so—sort of pretty to-night, mother, with your eyes shining that way, excited like, and your cheeks all colored up. Puts me in mind of when I was courting you. I—I'm a fellow of few words, and I don't know how to say fancy things, but God knows I'm glad you're all right—that it wasn't you that was hurt." He stammered, still embarrassed.

"Well—I'm glad, too," Hester murmured, surprised to find that, strangely enough, this was true.

It was frightening out there under the moon, alone. Romance—poetry—that wild tingling of the pulses—purple violets drenched with dew in a dim wood of dreams—these things were for the young and adventurous, not for a tired woman who wanted rest.

She looked around the comfortable clean room, almost with new eyes. She felt as if she'd been away from it for a year. Home—security—haven. Her children—and this stammering, crude, faithful man, standing there looking at her as he had looked the day they were married.

"You mean well, Lem," she said gently. "I expect I'm cross lots of times when I got no right to be. Now, I guess you better go find the children and tell 'em mother's home safe."

BALLADE OF THE ALL-LOVELIEST

I HAVE praised flowers, the generous rich rose,
The wistful violet whose downcast face
Moves to compassion, the more than pose
Of the pure lily, the languorous grace
Fluttering from the columbine, the trace
Of coquetry in pansies, the spell spun
By the white-magic webs of Queen Anne's lace;
But you are flower and star and woman in one!

And stars I have praised. Antares I chose
For warmth, endless, crimson as the mace
Of a nutmeg; yet Spica, too, which glows
Snowlike in Virgo, reproving the hot pace
Of mortals—dust-motes burning up in space
So measureless that in it our vast sun
Is nothing—Spica, scorner of the base;
But you are flower and star and woman in one!

Yes, and women I have praised. Their woes
Have touched my soul, even while their embrace
Has set fire to my weak clay. Who owes
More than I to women, regrets the chase
More deeply, though tempted by the god of Thrace
Still to pursue them, hunt them when they run,
Making the centaur in me champ to race?
But you are flower and star and woman in one!

ENVOI

Princess, I am too human for a place
In lily heart or heart of star-stern nun.
If yours be either, frown upon my case:
But you are flower and star and woman in one!

Richard Butler Glanzer

Oars

A STORY OF THE LAKE MICHIGAN COAST GUARD, WHEREIN WAVE AND FIRE TAKE THE MEASURE OF A MAN

By Karl W. Detzer

TOM LUCAS buttoned the blue sweater at his throat, wrapped his thin neck in two folds of a knit muffler, pulled the tabs of his wool pea cap down slowly across his red ears, and fumbled with the strings as he fastened them under his chin.

He stood in the center of the coast guard squad room at Tarpaulin Head station, and with clumsy fingers lighted his pipe. Then, without a word, he shuffled toward the door. In the brief interval that it gaped open, a blast of frosty wind filled the low room, making the lamp puff redly up its chimney.

Two other men still sat at the table, which was stacked with the disorderly remnants of a meal. Six thick plates, six stout coffee cups, six well-buttered knives—a half dozen had eaten; men; rather careless men.

The two who were left were young. When Lucas had gone, they looked at each other uncomfortably.

"He's getting worse!" Leonard, the younger, scowled and pushed back his plate. "You'd think he was scairt of the dark!"

"He's sick," Chris Nelson answered. "It's a sickness, that feeling he's got. They say he used to be the best man on the crew. It was him took off the three wimmen, alone, mind you, when the Hawthorne busted up on the shoal."

They arose from the table and solemnly stacked the plates. Neither spoke as they washed dishes in the neat kitchen at the rear of the coast guard house. Before they had finished, Captain James—Dead Reckoning James—who commanded the crew, stamped in with snow on his cap and an armload of white driftwood against his beard.

"Where's Lucas?" he asked shortly. He was a solid man, gray about the ears, with long arms and bowed legs.

"Went north on beach patrol," Nelson reported.

"Oh!" That was all for a moment. The captain frowned at his armload of driftwood. "Doyle got the engine fixed yet? Go see. Tell him to report when it's running good."

Once more he started through to his own quarters, once more turned back. "They's weather making. She's shifting around to the nor'west. Right squally. Keep an eye open on patrol and tower watch, lads."

"Yes, sir," they answered.

Leonard pushed open the front door of the station quarters, and ducked out into the whistling night. Darkness jammed across his eyes. Wet snow caked on his boots, and a few moist flakes clung to his hot cheeks. Down on the wash he made out gray blobs of foam as Lake Michigan thrashed against the beach.

Far out on an invisible horizon, North Island light flashed a surly red. Nearer, yet less distinct, the two masthead lamps of Schooner Shoal lightship blinked attentively into the void.

The sky was starless above the watch tower. Beyond the tower the boathouse bulked in thick shadows. Lantern light shone in its many paned window. Leonard pushed open the rear door, and bolted in unceremoniously.

II

THE two boats of Tarpaulin Head station crouched in their cradles above the steeply inclined track. The smaller, a clinker built surf boat with its extra oars on wall pegs beside it, smelled of fresh paint. In the larger, open like its sister, except for a canvas spray hood, Engineer Doyle grunted over the motor.

He spoke before Leonard had a chance.

"Hello!" he cried. "Capt'n sent you to see if the engine's running, eh? I knowed what you wanted! I'm a good guesser, young fellow. I know what the old man's thinkin'—weather makin', and he wants the boat ready. Well, she's ready! Loose wire was the matter. Soon as I found it, she spun like a top."

Doyle leaped over the side and wiped his hands on a bit of waste. He was a trim, vigorous, well-set-up man of forty, with self-confidence in every gesture.

"Where's Timid Tom?" he wanted to know.

"Patrol north."

Doyle laughed immoderately.

"He'll come back seeing wrecks and collisions and sudden death to-night," he snorted. He opened the door, admitting boisterous winds. "Make sure the latch catches."

The bell in the tower struck once as the two men ran to the station house. Carlson stood watch. It was eight thirty, dark as midnight. In the men's big room, Captain James waited, the driftwood still in his arms.

"Engine's running," Doyle reported. "I'll turn in."

The captain merely nodded, and his door closed behind him. But Doyle did not go directly. Lighting his pipe, he fidgeted near the stove.

"If Tom Lucas tells that story about the mail boat just once more," he threatened; "tells it like he did at supper, I'll take my meals alone in my bunk. I'm sick of hearin' it. It's an alibi, boys. Just because a man's been aboard a burning gas boat and seen some people get kilt, ain't no reason he's got to spend the rest of his life talkin' about it."

Chris Nelson looked up sharply.

"It must of been pretty awful, Doyle. He's still shook up."

"Shook up?" Doyle cleared his throat derisively. "Why, man, he's daft! Plumb and complete daft! And a daft man's no one to have around coast guard."

Nelson, rising impatiently, brought his heels down hard on the scrubbed pine floor.

"I tell you, Doyle, Tom's a good man. Don't buck him. He'll get over this shakiness. He's a good surfman yet!"

"Surfman? Listen, boy! This is a new business, this coast guard work. Oars was all right when we hadn't something better. But it's gasoline that pushes us off to

wrecks these days, and it's guts that keeps us there. Good surfman? Now, when a man knows nothing about engines, and has got no guts, like Timid Tom—"

The door swung open with a gusty blast.

III

TOM LUCAS, his eyes blinking out tears that the wind had put there, staggered into the lamplight. He banged shut the door behind him.

"What's that?" he cried, panting. "Me that's got no guts? Never mind, I'll tend you later, Doyle! Where's captain? Nelson, quick, tell the old man—"

He stopped, coughing. Captain James, wearing slippers and a patched smoking jacket, ran back into the room.

"What's the matter, Tom? Eh? Out with it!"

"Why, sir, I was about a mile north, and—"

"What'd you see?"

"Well, sir, I can't swear, but it looked like—thought I saw it—by Mackinac, I thought I saw it—a rocket—"

"Rocket?"

Dead Reckoning James swung about to the wall telephone that connected with the tower on the beach. He slapped its receiver against his heavy ear.

"Carlson? Capt'n speaking. See anything north might of been a rocket? No lights, even? Well, keep a sharp eye." He hung up the receiver.

"Carlson didn't see anything," he reported. "Better get out again, Tom. All the way this time."

The door slammed as he returned to his own quarters, scratching his head. Doyle laughed.

Tom Lucas stepped forward angrily. He was a tall, wind-roughed man, who might have been thirty-five and might have been fifty. His thin hair curled down over his forehead.

"Listen, Doyle!" he said, hoarsely. "I don't want that 'Timid Tom' talk. I heard it. And I ain't likely to stand for it, either!"

Captain James poked his face inquiringly through the door. Lucas halted at the sight of his superior, opened his mouth to accuse Doyle, and shut it without the accusation. He pulled on his gloves, and, speaking no further word, sloshed back into the night.

On a strap to his shoulder he carried the

report clock. Two and a half miles north of Tarpaulin Head station, a white painted post thrust out of the sand, and chained to the post was a key. Once during each patrol the man on beach watch must carry the recorder to the post, where the key punches the hour on a paper dial in his clock.

The storm, raging out of the northwest, bit deep into Lucas's rough cheeks. Snow raced on the wind; the last snow of the season, no doubt, for it was the twenty-eighth night of March. In two more weeks gentle west and southwest breezes would be playing through the sand grass.

Lucas pulled his cap tight across his eyes and plunged on through the screech of wind. Squally blasts ripped froth from the breakers and hurled it like chewing teeth against his cold face.

At each drop of the wind, which was gusty and unstable, as is common at the opening of a gale, the coast guardsman halted, panting, and stared in a wide circle at the lake. Its water thrashed ominous, secretive. It showed dim, gray, advancing ranges of foam-capped breakers, with short, black furrows between them.

Through flurries of snow, the North Island light still winked its bloodshot eye, the masthead lamps of the lightship still burned dim. But a rocket?

Lucas climbed a soft hummock of sand. Shielding his eyes, he peered once more out into the wild, howling dark.

Rocket? Well— He wondered miserably why he saw such things. It couldn't have been a rocket, or Carlson would have spotted it, too, from the tower. Yet, be damned if he hadn't seen a shot of light! Out there, north by nor'west, just for a second, a flash going up to the sky.

New winds harried his idle legs, and he plunged on to keep warm. What was coming over him? He ought to have thrashed Doyle right then and there for calling him Timid Tom. Dead Reckoning James would have thrashed him. The captain had heard Doyle, to be sure. And Doyle was only Number Two man, and he, Tom Lucas, eighteen years in the service, and seeing rockets where no rockets were, was Number One. Here was the question: Was he timid? Scared?

At the white post he twisted the key in his clock, and, with his ear against it, heard the *ping* as it registered. Then he climbed over slippery sand ridges to the dune be-

hind, where he could gain three or four miles of vision because of the height.

IV

TIMID? It was that damnable gas boat fire last year that did it! He had never been the same since. *He* knew it! Didn't take any engineer named Doyle to tell him! Swimming had saved him that time, swimming for endless hours. No one else got off. Burned. Ugh!

And ever since, no spine. Guts, Doyle had called it. And all this newfangled engine business. Doyle certainly could make an engine go. But a mean customer. Bucking him. Wanted to be Number One man himself.

Lucas swung about once more toward the lake. Black, sightless distances, no sign of stack or spar. Emptiness, darkness, loneliness, and the rush of immense and maniacal winds. He gritted his teeth. Where was his old spunk? Well, where was it? That was the problem.

The Number One man of Tarpaulin Head crew, second in command to Dead Reckoning James himself, staggered back toward the station, fearful to look behind him, driven by nameless frights, hearing over and over the voices of men dying by fire, and through them, above them, the confident words of Engineer Doyle, speaking scornfully of "Timid Tom."

Two and a half miles—two miles—over the sand ridge—one mile—the clock was damnably heavy on its strap—half a mile—the light in the boathouse window shone clear, now—quarter mile—why was he running. He should be walking.

He halted precipitately in the sand. He must stop this running, he told himself, savagely. Must get a hold on himself. There—that was better.

He walked ahead slowly. His patrol would be finished in five minutes; he'd sit and talk until time to go to bed, and listen to Doyle tell of gasoline engines.

Queer things, those ugly, black cylinders! A man had to have knack in his fingers and brain to understand them. Doyle had that knack. Too bad, though, that there'd be no more oarsmen. A few more years, and no more oarsmen.

He kicked the snow off his boots. The big room stood empty. Lucas punched the clock again, to indicate the time he got in—ten minutes before the hour. He crossed to the stove and hung his knit gloves care-

fully to dry. In the kitchen, where coffee still steamed on the range, he poured out a black, bitter cup.

Doyle and the others were abed, no doubt. He turned once more to the door for a final, cautious examination of the lake.

Then it was that he heard it.

The bell clattered excitedly on the tower. Like a gossip with a mouthful of bad news, it rattled out across the wind. Carlson was jerking that lanyard. A call? A wreck?

The telephone shrilled like a maniac. Carlson himself blew in through the door on a gust.

"Call!" he was shouting. "Captain! Tom! Doyle! Call, men!"

For a second, Tom Lucas stood motionless. He saw Carlson's face dimly in a haze of apprehension. Overhead he heard heavy boots bang down on the floor, the cries of men half wakened, and Captain James thundering in his throat.

Carlson had stopped his shouting. He ran back to the door, stuck out his nose, and ran in again. Lucas secured his drying gloves while the other men were getting down the stairs.

He saw them come: Doyle first, of course! Doyle, running down lightly, as calm as if he were going to beach drill. Then Leonard, hunting his own gloves in all his pockets. Next Nelson, strapping his cap under his chin.

Then Anderson, a tall, sour lad who suffered from headaches, and who ate too much. Next Smith, the fisherman, in a borrowed sweater.

Then Captain James, snorting and clawing at his beard.

"What the devil?" he wanted to know, and his voice had a raw, fighting edge.

"Call!" Carlson shouted. "Nor'west, couple o' miles, fire!"

"Fire!" the captain repeated slowly, as if he did not believe it.

"Fire!" cried Tom Lucas. So he *had* seen light in the nor'west!

Doyle ran through the banging door. Doyle, first out. Lucas took snow from his heels. Captain James, halting on the path, stared into the north.

"She's burning, all right!" He jumped to his place at the stern, on the highest point of the tilted concrete runway. Doyle and Lucas already gripped the gunwales just before him. Anderson stood opposite

Smith, halfway down. At the bow Nelson and Leonard, the two recruits, held tight with nervous fingers.

"Launch boat!" the captain commanded, hoarsely.

V

THE lifeboat eased forward on its cradle. The crew ran alongside it, out from the protection of the house, into the fury of the night. Spray spat into their faces.

At the end of the runway, where two cedar poles continued into the wash, Leonard and Nelson thrust stripped rollers under the bow. It lifted, hesitated, then ran on down.

Lucas saw Nelson jump as the first icy breaker caught heartlessly at his knees. He saw Leonard, the youngest man in the crew, fling all his scant weight upon the side, holding against the pressure of the wind. Steadily he guided his end.

"Get that engine running!" There was a note of irascibility in Captain James's voice. "Doyle!" He snapped out the name.

Doyle clawed overside. Lucas felt cold waves suck at his own ankles. The bow was afloat, all right; it poked upward for a second, and the Number One man, holding with a fury in his fingers until it should be his turn to jump, saw Nelson's right arm uplifted grotesquely against the sky as he eased hurriedly into his cork life preserver.

He heard Doyle swear indistinctly. A second wave lifted the bow. Anderson scrambled into the boat. He grasped a pike pole and jammed it against the sand, trying to hold with his two cold hands against the fury of the lake.

"Doyle, get that engine running! Now! This minute, or we'll row!"

It was Dead Reckoning James. A command. His last command of that night, but who could guess that? Only Lucas and the captain were left in the water. They waded out, ankle deep, Carlson with them, Carlson who must stay in the tower, keeping watch, while the other men were gone.

One second, two, three—the boat took to antics in the waste of time. While the engineer worked savagely to start the engine, it made a crazy, sidelong lurch, snapped off the pike pole in Anderson's hands, flung the bow landward, and with a headstrong twist, crushed down vehemently upon Dead Reckoning James, smashed his

legs under him, sent him wallowing in the wash.

There was horrified confusion for a second. Then Carlson ran out and dragged Dead Reckoning James away. But what good is a captain with two broken legs when a steamship is burning four miles north by northwest?

"I'm out!" he shouted, his voice still angry. "You, Tom Lucas, command!"

Lucas stood alone in the water. The undercurrent sucked the boat away toward the lake. Doyle still swore at the engine.

"Can't seem—to start—"

Lucas leaped into the captain's place in the stern and grasped the long steering oar. He stood up with a fierce, savage exultation in his heart.

"Men!" he cried. "Steady—" He took a deep breath, saw Doyle still grinding at the crank, felt gravely bottom under the keel. "Out oars!"

Nelson, Leonard, Anderson, Smith sat in their places on the thwarts. The oars swung out.

"Hear me, Doyle?"

The engineer's oar popped overside.

"Let fall—ah—give away!"

With a single, concentrated swing the five oars of Tarpaulin Head gripped the waves, and the tempestuous lifeboat pushed toward the open lake. Tom Lucas, Timid Tom, commanded. And up in the north, now bright, now obscured by snow, lights kindled red and orange.

VI

FIRE! Lucas pinched his lips together tight and squinted. Wrecks he had seen aplenty, collisions, groundings, capsized freighters, naked schooners grinding out dead timbers on lonely reefs. He had taken men off all of them. But fire? He had seen fire at sea only once.

He was a passenger that time. Fire it was that had put his age on him, had stiffened his joints and made him think slowly, had given him the cold fidgets.

And here he was, holding the sweep in command, guiding a lifeboat resolutely through mountainous breakers, with a glow on the snowy sky ahead, with four long supplicant blasts repeated and o'er-repeated, crying for help in the guttural language of steam.

He turned his head. They had made little progress. The rim of pines on Tarpaulin Head still hung close above them.

"Get into it!" he howled. "Row, you men. Long swing there, Doyle, pull!"

Doyle retorted under his breath. The wind slapped the words away, and Lucas, chewing his under lip, kept silent.

Five minutes. He bent his sweep to starboard, swinging the boat to port. Would they ever get out from shore? Ten minutes. They hadn't crossed the bar yet. What the devil! Had these men forgotten how to row?

"Lean on 'em, men! Give all you got!"

Fifteen minutes. The glow in the sky brightened rapidly. Whenever the buoyant lifeboat swung up to the crest of a roller, flame itself stabbed out of the dark horizon, purple, red, yellow, pink, blue.

Twenty minutes.

These were landsmen on his thwarts! These weren't surfmen! Gasoline had done it! They couldn't row a skiff in a river!

"Row! Row, I tell ye! You, Leonard! You, Doyle! Pull!"

The engineer's head came up savagely. He growled like an angry dog. Lucas, hearing it, pinched his lips together. Doyle might growl all the way to Mackinac Straits and back again, providing he rowed. Tarpaulin Head crew was needed out there. It was fire. Fire aboard ship in a gale, and sailors waiting to be rescued.

Twenty-five minutes.

Four long, sorrowful blasts. Then snow so thick that it blotted out the flare in the sky. The pines on Tarpaulin Head were lost, now. The lifeboat had made headway. It bucked each roller bravely, bounced atop each wave, slid dizzily into the narrow troughs.

Fierce gusts ripped open the snow clouds. Lucas felt the excited thumping of his own heart as he stared ahead. Two miles north, wallowing broadside in the seas, he suddenly made the vessel out, a long, low freighter, blazing from stern post to foremast in a terrible, glorious debauch of light.

Far forward, crowded together about the bow, insignificant moving shadows told of a beaten crew.

Timid Tom saw his own boat buck into a wave. It climbed feebly, dropped back defeated. He saw a second roller heave up between it and the fire. A third sea, its top lathered into foam, pressed against the Tarpaulin craft like a thousand stanch hands, and drove it shoreward.

Lucas gritted his teeth. He summoned more strength to hold the sweep firm.

"Men! By Mackinac, men! Row, row, you lazy devils! Pull! Are you a lot o' widders? Doyle, you pull, or by Betsy you go over! Hear me, Doyle? You tinker! Row!"

He breathed spasmodically. His tongue raced like the wind in a jumble of prayers and curses. Oh, for a crew of men! Old-fashioned men with iron in their elbows! He stormed insanely as a wave slapped overside, raged at his oarsmen for it, lashed every man in the boat with bitter words, cursed them in the whole-souled vocabulary of salt and fresh water seas, cried for speed.

The steamer swung end for end. She was not steering. Her silly antics told of an unmanned rudder. Far up, atop the bridge, a single figure, made small by distance, blocked out against the light. The master. Alone, impotent, defeated, he held to his lifeless wheel. Below him milled his crew. Behind him roared fire.

"Half mile more!" Lucas shouted, and leaned on his sweep.

The first pungent odor of burned timbers challenged him across the wind, a warm, dry breath out of the snowy night.

VII

LUCAS knew Doyle was watching. He knew Doyle saw him stiffen as if the blood froze in him, saw him lean forward, forgetting his sweep, gasping, sniffing the smoky wind, saw resolution leak from his spine.

Smoke! Lucas smelled it and sickened. Worse than gas, it acted on his lungs. He gaped, mouth open, at the on-coming steamer, sniffed, sniffed, sniffed.

The lifeboat canted up the side of a mountainous wave; it tipped dangerously; swam on safely. Lucas choked. He had steered very poorly that time. He leaned on his sweep and spit savagely to rid his throat of whatever clogged it. With each nauseous breath he lived again the horrors of that other fire. Sick, he was! But the thing that made him sick was fear.

Fear of the smell of smoke!

The steamer swung again, end for end. Her whistle had silenced its call for help. She tilted to port, and limped heavily. Her bow lifted out of rushing seas. Triumphant breakers smashed down headfirst on her black stern.

For the first time, Engineer Doyle addressed the crew.

"Best get to wind'ard of her!" he shouted, urgently.

His voice stirred Timid Tom. There was command in that voice. And who was supposed to be commanding? Doyle? Not by the Almighty's stars, he wasn't! With a wrench, Lucas brought back his flagging nerves. He leaned resolutely on the sweep, and his boat swung neatly toward the vessel's bow.

Smoke puffed out of the coal bunkers, forward of the funnel. Impudent flames licked along the rail. The whole cargo must be ablaze; three hatches amidships were spitting out fire.

Lucas could see the crew plainly now. The captain still stood alone on his bridge. Planned to go down with her, did he? Lucas swore. Fool! Why should a man try to drown when a life-saver in a government boat is nigh drowning himself to get him in to land?

Snow swooped between his eyes and the steamer. When it tore apart, he stared unbelievably, then screamed: "Back water!"

The stern of the freighter had heaved perilously. It moved with a heavy, persistent roll toward the small dancing lifeboat, twisted faster as it drew broadside into the wind, sloshed through rollers with careless gestures.

"Back water!"

Fire swept overside. It scorched the six cold, upturned faces in the lifeboat, scorched them and left them smarting.

"Back water—steady—"

The men on the thwarts raised their heads. They perceived a new authority in Lucas's voice—Lucas, who had turned faint at the smell of burning wood, who had dropped his tiller at the first smell of heat, now leaped full of a mad, ferocious energy at the touch of flame. All the fear, the sickening timidity, the dread, were seared out of him. With headstrong unconcern, he steered close in.

"Pull!" he cried powerfully. "Pull, you devils—alongside!"

He heard seamen cheer aboard the vessel. With a shout that stirred even the captain on the bridge, they greeted their deliverance, a deliverance pulling closer, a boat driven by a gaunt, wind-blown man who stood in the stern, lips wide, howling ghastly and impenitent blasphemies at five men with half broken backs.

Fire cascaded down upon them, and licked greedy tongues at their faces. Anderson missed a stroke.

"Are ye dead, ye jackal?" Lucas cried.

Doyle ducked his nose into his muffler and squeezed shut his eyes.

"Look!" Lucas bellowed. "Ye cowardly dogfish! Look where you're at! Pull—stead-d-y!"

VIII

INSUFFERABLE heat billowed into them. While Doyle faltered, and Chris Nelson rolled his eyes and gasped, while Anderson pulled feebly and knew that his thundering head would burst, while Leonard and Smith pinched tight their lips and tried not to think, Tom Lucas steered unflinchingly.

He challenged a cataract of flame, and faced it with exultant defiance. His boat thumped the high wooden side of the steamer. He made out her name, the Margaret Ann.

"A line, you!" To his crew: "Ship oars!"

A coil of small rope dropped overside from the steamer and uncurled in the wet bottom of the lifeboat.

"Grab it, Doyle—Doyle, are ye dead?"

Lucas jerked in his sweep, and reached with his own stiff fingers for the rope. He yanked it, and made fast the heavier line on its end.

"One at a time!" he bellowed.

A fat man slid from the deck high above. The lifeboat, plunging in the lee of the wreck, took him in. A fellow in a dirty apron came second, the cook; and now a sailor with two fingers missing from his right hand.

"Three!" Lucas counted. "Catch him, Doyle!"

The engineer mumbled. He was choking, Lucas observed, coughing, floundering in the bottom of the boat, concealing his bared head from the terrific heat, spitting out smoke.

Two engineers in oily overalls and a black-faced stoker slid down from the Margaret Ann.

"Six!" Lucas counted aloud. "Ease off a fathom of that rope!"

Two more stokers.

"Eight."

The lifeboat bounced to the top of a wave. The steamer canted farther to port. On his tipsy bridge, the captain stood, blind to the rescue, watching flames march triumphantly along his ship.

"He'll be hard!" Lucas muttered.

Two deck hands and a galley boy dropped into the lifeboat.

"Eleven."

Two more heads thrust overside. Arguing. Officers, no doubt.

"Quick!" Lucas demanded.

They hesitated. One man dropped. It was the second officer.

"Can't get the captain," he reported. "First officer's staying on along with him."

The lifeboat swung out precariously. It jerked as its hemp line became taut, and slid back until it thumped against the hot side of the freighter. Lucas peered up dizzily through smoke and snow and whipping embers. It was a scant ten feet to the deck, so far had the wreck tipped—likely to topple over any time, now.

"Volunteers!" he cried.

Chris Nelson, his knuckles bleeding through his heavy gloves, held up one hand. The Number One man shook his head fiercely and muttered: "Too young!" Anderson turned his gaze aside under Lucas's demanding eyes. Stepping over sailors, Leonard started to crawl aft.

"Volunteers!" Lucas bellowed again. He glowered at Doyle. "You, Doyle! I'm goin' m'self, you come along!"

Engineer Doyle, sweating, tried to sit up. He lifted his face in time to meet a mighty wave of flame that slashed down from the burning freighter.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "Cast off! We'll burn, Tom Lucas. You're a fool—"

"Hold fast that line!" Lucas ordered.

IX

THE steamer canted to a steeper angle. Men from the lifeboat and men from the Margaret Ann shouted together as the vessel lurched. Timid Tom squinted under scorched eyebrows. For a short, ferocious breath he stared at the smoke-sick engineer; then he took a turn of stout rope about one wet glove and straightened up on the thwart.

Hand over hand he mounted—slipped—righted himself. Climbing the rail, he faced the first officer.

"Best hurry!" he panted. "My God, think we got all day?" He shook his glove at the bridge. "Bring that fool down!"

"Capt'n won't come—he's sot," the officer answered.

"I'll fetch him!"

He fumbled for the bridge ladder. He went up impatiently, three steps, four. Over his shoulder he saw the lifeboat pitch

to the top of a swell. A long way down it seemed, now. He saw red faces turned anxiously toward him, and the bent back of Doyle. The captain of the Margaret Ann swung on him petulantly.

"Get down! Let me be!" he commanded. "It's my ship—"

The steamer rolled still farther. Like the steep roof of a house, her deck slanted. Far aft along crackling timbers, past hatches that howled with fire, just forward of the smoking coal bunkers, sounded a chill snap, like the breaking of a giant icicle.

The funnel reared backward. A blazing rift spread across the beam. The stern canted to starboard. The Margaret Ann had broken in two.

For one paralyzed instant, Timid Tom held his breath. Below, in the black pandemonium of raging water, he made out the lifeboat still precariously close to the bow. He heard the scared shouts of seamen above the racket of storm and fire. He had one smoky glimpse of Engineer Doyle leaping toward the thin line that held the lifeboat to its treacherous giant companion.

The Margaret Ann, her stern broken away, canted once more to port, with a slow methodical gesture, went over, over — forty-five degrees — farther — no hurry about it—over five more degrees—dipped her port rail—exultant seas leaped upon her deck and clawed at the fire—over five more degrees—and with an immense and splendid dignity as befits a proud ship, she showed a broken, disgraced keel to the snowy sky.

In the last flood of brilliant firelight, Lucas saw Doyle sway on his feet with an uplifted ax and cut the line that tied the lifeboat to danger, the line that meant safety to Lucas.

"Over!" the captain cried.

"Over!" the mate repeated.

"Over!" a dozen voices wailed from the small boat.

Lucas gripped the captain tightly by his shoulder. The man did not fight off rescue. They struck the water aslant, but the cork jacket on Lucas's shoulders yanked them immediately upward.

Intrepid flames mocked the black lake. Lucas spit up a throatful of water, and drew the captain after him. Twenty boat lengths off, by the unstable radiance of the dying firelight, he saw the trim white side

of the Tarpaulin Head boat. In the stern, his hands on the sweep, the engineer was directing its course.

Was Doyle searching for him? Was he?

X

A WAVE put the boat out of sight. Lucas, battling for himself and another, slid at last into the trough between two rollers. The light from the burning ship flamed up violently, and went out. In its place darkness settled.

Lucas shouted, heard no reply, shouted again. His lungs threatened to burst with the effort. He floated aimlessly. Two short pieces of wreckage bobbed past. Then a gray, vaulting shape approached slowly from the south—the lifeboat—coming toward him. Its small searchlight swept the water.

A man was shouting hoarsely. Doyle?

Timid Tom clung stubbornly to the exhausted captain. Would Doyle risk sinking the boat to hunt him? Would he? Might capsize if he took any one else aboard. Be easy to abandon an enemy.

The lifeboat pitched toward him.

"Climb on, Tom!" Doyle cried. "Boost the old man first!"

"Can't—"

"I'll help," said Doyle, and gave a gasp of effort.

Day broke muggily. The Tarpaulin Head crew, under command of Tom Lucas, toiled back wearily to their station. It was a tortuous journey. The first officer of the Margaret Ann had not come to the surface after the burning freighter split in two. Twenty minutes the lifeboat hunted him. Then Lucas flung two cork jackets overboard, saw them sweep away senselessly, empty.

"Out oars," he ordered, "give 'way, pull!"

Fishermen, farmers from the hills, the doctor who had set two broken legs for Dead Reckoning James, waded in to help land the boat. On Red Reef, four miles offshore, the wreck of the Margaret Ann piled up promiscuously.

Tom Lucas jumped out first of the crew and caught the cable from Carlson's hands. His frozen clothing cracked as he steadied the overweighted craft. Unloading was slow. He turned his head to find Doyle gripping the gunwale, knuckle to knuckle with him.

"Thanks, Doyle," he said.

The engineer looked up at him, a humble, sidelong glance, filled with misgiving.

"Want me to ask for a transfer, Tom?"

"You? Transfer? What for? You saved my life."

"You got guts, Tom."

"Um. Mebbe. I dunno."

"You'll be acting captain, with Dead Reckoning James laid up."

"I will?"

"Good job you done, Tom, you and oars."

"Me? Oars? Listen, Doyle. She was a long pull. Oars take the stomach out of a man, rowing that far." A breaker heaved the clinker side of the boat against his chest. Waist high in icy froth, he chuckled.

"Doyle!"

"Aye?"

"Fix the engine."

The Understudy

THE STORMY STORY OF MAY—THE GIRL, NOT THE MONTH—
WHO YEARNED TO BE A LEADING LADY

By B. Beatrice Lubitz

BROADWAY steamed under a relentless August sun. The air was hot and so dead that the heavy vapors of gasoline hung brooding over the asphalt. Cars clanged, automobiles hooted, wilting men and women marched along in that never ending afternoon processional.

May Reilly walked up Broadway, one of the throng, yet distinctive enough to warrant passing glances, despite the heat. One looked at May Reilly. One wondered who she was.

She might have been anybody, really. She walked as if buoyed up from within, her flashing golden-brown eyes straight ahead, nose high, the warm, creamy, freckled skin flushed and rosy as a baby's, fresh from deep sleep.

You would never know that May Reilly was looking for a job. In her vanity box, covered with powder and mixed with papers, subway tickets, old theater stubs, and addresses, she carried a small card, introducing May Reilly to Clinton Bourk, director of the Players' League Theater. The card was further signed in the flowing, looped handwriting of Penelope Deemster—Mrs. Deemster's Theatrical Agency—the Link Between the Producer and the Performer Since 1910.

It was a short walk from Mrs. Deemster's office to the Players' League Theater

on West Fiftieth Street. The theater gleamed like a bit of French pastry amid the drab garages, office buildings, and shops on the block. It was of pink stucco, trimmed with wrought iron railings, pots of stunted green fir, and carved and tortuous friezes of fair, floating maidens.

May verified the address with the card, and stopped for a moment to squint up at the building. Then, with some difficulty, she found the green door with the white-washed inscription *Stage Entrance*, and without further delay walked in.

There was a rush of cool air and the smell of paint. May found herself on the stage where groups of people stood about, whispering. There was nothing timid or shy about May Reilly, even though this was exactly the third time she had been on the stage of a theater. No one knew that, of course. Usually she had not got beyond the office of the manager.

May had a desire now to explore. She wanted to see the orchestra, the wings, and how the theater looked from the stage—and to visualize herself thereon.

A tall, dark man in white linen knickers, an easy, long figure, met her eye. He was as beautiful as a woman, yet he was masculine in an aggressive sort of way. He was talking to a shaggy man, also in shirt-sleeves; and a third chap, a slim, dapper

young fellow of the new, popular Prince of Wales type, stood by, laughing.

It was this youth who interrupted May's tour of inspection.

"Will the ladies who are here as extras line up on this side, please," he said in a very English voice, "and remove their hats; and the gentlemen on the other, please."

May was forced to obey. She felt belittled standing on line. Some day, when she'd be famous, she vowed, she'd make this daffodilly young fellow eat out of her hand. She regarded him down her nose, yet rather liked his nice manners. Some one called him Mart, but to May he was—and always remained—Wales.

II

THE titter of conversation on the line died down as the tall director strolled over.

With him, May studied each girl. Through his dark, thoughtful eyes she saw them. They were for the most part rather shoddy looking, she thought, and only a few looked as if they were professional.

May was a student at the Brooklyn Training School for Teachers through family demand, but, during the summer, an applicant for theatrical honors. She believed the mark of the theater was a drooping hat, mascaraed lashes, and rhinestones.

"You'll do," he said to the first girl, tall, with exotic features and a slow smile. "You stay. You won't do, nor you, nor you, nor you." He decided quickly, tapping the girls on the shoulder, his voice always kind and impersonal.

May thought his choice very inadequate. The girl beside her was taken.

May was next. She held her breath, her feet tingled with that pins and needles sensation that comes when they have been asleep. She looked up at him, yet not daring to look at him.

"You won't do!"

It was like a death knell. There was a terrific clatter in May's brain as if stacks and stacks of dishes had tumbled over and smashed.

"Why not?" she demanded angrily.

There was a silence—a full-blooded, thrilling silence. Two or three young women, walking out, stopped to look.

Wales gasped, his eyes full of disbelief. Even the important-looking, shabby man with an armful of manuscripts and newspapers, glanced up in amazement.

The director looked at her—full at her. "You're too short," he explained, pleasantly, after a bit.

"I'm no shorter than she," May declared breathlessly, pointing to the last successful applicant.

The director smiled, ever so slightly, and studied the two.

"No, you're right," he decided. "Stay! You'll do!"

A flood of color poured into her face. She was wet from head to foot. It took several seconds for her blood pressure to drop to normal. Then her eyes glittered triumphantly.

She had won the job! She was now an actress! She got off the line and wandered about the stage, unconsciously posing in the best spots—upper center, lower center, center.

The rest of the mob was quickly dismissed. The young man, Mart, took names and addresses of the successful ones, and ordered them for rehearsal at 2 P.M. on Monday.

The girls straggled out. Besides the three men, May alone remained. She looked up toward the balconies that curved around the back of the theater like double rows of smoke-stained teeth in a wide-gaping mouth. She pictured her family in those seats. David would sit there, too, and yearn for her.

She curled her lips as she thought of David. That boob! He said she would never get a theatrical job. What would he say now? No, he hadn't a chance—she'd never marry him.

"That's all for now, Miss Reilly, you can go."

"Oh?"

"I said that's all for to-day."

It was the Prince of Wales. The stage was otherwise deserted. May had a fleeting vision that they were playing leads in some vast drama.

"Nice theater," she smiled dazzlingly.

"Thinking of buying it?"

"You're some little wizard on the repartee, aren't you?"

The young man looked dazed, then smiled, with his lips oblique.

"I presume this is the first time you've ever been on a stage."

"Well, you've got to begin some time," May replied, patting her soft coil of fiery hair, and pulling out and poking in the hairpins. She was completely at her ease,

posing elaborately. "This part in the mob is to be my debut."

"You're about nineteen, aren't you? Any of your family in the theater? I mean, is your mother or father in the profession?"

"No, I'm the first of a long line of theatrical people," May answered, smiling charmingly. "I'm an ancestor. My granddaughter will be pretty good, don't you think so?"

"Yes, if you survive. Actresses are born, not made."

May extracted her powder puff from the miniature coffin that was her vanity box, and operated on her face. Then she looked at him sidewise.

"You don't like me. You are trying to discourage me. But I'll make you like me just the same!"

"Why, my dear young lady, I certainly am not trying to discourage you; only I think every one entering the profession should have their first illusions shattered."

He looked about the deserted stage, then took a step nearer.

"You're not lacking in spunk, anyhow. Do you know you're lucky Clinton Bourk didn't take you by the scruff of your nice little neck and throw you out."

"Did he ever do that to you?"

"No," laughed Mart. "You see, I was here before him. I've been connected with the theater for many years; since I was seven, in fact."

"Oh! Actor or usher?"

"You have a sharp tongue, young lady. But to show you that I don't hold it against you, and do like you, come on out and I'll buy you an orangeade, and we'll drink a toast to your career as the American Duse."

"Right."

She sidled out by his side, playing with him with her eyes and words. He sauntered beside her, out of the building, and on the corner they found an orangeade stand. They clicked glasses.

"To your success, Freshie."

"To yours, Prince of Wales."

They drank. May laughed over her glass, and her eyes, in the late afternoon sun, were the same color as the liquid. They were both gallant and youthful humans, and full of the zest of life.

Before they parted, she remembered to ask what his job was.

"I'm one of the sceneshifters," he said loftily, to show he didn't mean it.

"No, honest."

"Well, I'll tell you the truth. I'm assistant stage manager."

"Whee!" May whooped discreetly. "First day in the theater, sass the celebrated Bourk, drink orange juice with the assistant stage manager, and call him by a nickname! No one will ever believe me, because I lie most of the time—and here's the Gawd's truth!"

Mart laughed as they shook hands. "The trouble, my dear young lady, is that they usually believe much worse." He waved to her gayly as he reentered the yawning door of the theater.

"Good-by, Wales!" she had called after him.

III

THE Reillys lived in one of those ancient brownstone houses that used to be the tooth and nail of respectability. The Reillys—and they told it to you the moment you came in—lived in the house for eighteen years, and May said that was just eighteen years too long.

You entered by way of the basement, which was on the same level as the street. After you identified the smell in the hallway as camphor and ancient varnish, you found yourself in the Reilly dining room, which was also sitting room, living room, library, sewing room, and general utility room.

May bounced in. There was always a fearful clatter when she entered. It was her way of announcing it was she. It was done by banging the iron gate until it groaned, and then slamming the inside door until the dishes in the pantry closet shivered and whined.

The entire family was there: Jim Reilly, a mild man, who was a local politician by temperament and an undertaker by profession; Mrs. Reilly, who looked like the benevolent old lady who holds a loaf of bread in the advertisement: "When Mother Makes It, It Must Be Good!"; Francis X. Reilly, a handsome, distinguished looking young priest, assistant rector of St. Michael's; and the two older girls, Mary and Agnes, both school-teachers.

"I got a stage job!" May announced gleefully, throwing her hat on the leather lounge which stood along the wall, as it does in nearly every similar house in Brooklyn.

"I don't believe it," Agnes declared.

She sat by the screened window, sewing, her neat little face shiny with perspiration.

"All right, I'm a liar," May retorted, equally. "But this is the truth. Swear to Francis! I'm on the stage."

The sluggish air became electrified. Bridget, the maid—who had been with the family since May was ten—stopped laying the table for supper, and gaped.

"Oh, May, you never did!" Mrs. Reilly gasped, looking frightened.

"Mamma, it's perfectly respectable. Isn't it, Francis? I've got a job with the best company in the city, ma, and the highest-class theater. You know, ma, we saw that Russian play there last winter. That's the company. I'm in their new theater, and a girl can be decent and still get on the stage, and the assistant manager is simply wonderful."

All this May said without stopping once to breathe.

"Do you think it's all right for a girl, Francis?" the mother quavered.

"Sure, it's all right," May interrupted, paying no attention to Mary, who was opening her mouth and closing it without getting a chance to speak. "Isn't a Governor's niece on the stage, and the president of some South American republic—well, his daughter's on the stage, and Lady Diana Manners, of England, and some Italian princess, and all the Russian nobles are in the theater. Every time you sit in the theater, you nudge a Russian noble. And they're all just as aristocratic as the Reillys."

"What part have you got, child?" the father asked, mildly, looking up from the newspaper, and pushing his glasses back on his forehead.

"I'm in the mob," May answered, a little apologetically; "but the assistant stage manager is going to coach me as understudy in the star's part."

Then and there, May decided that Mart actually should coach her as understudy in the star's part.

"In the mob!" jeered Agnes. "Well, I must say you're going to play an important rôle. I suppose your name will appear under 'servants, townsfolk, soldiers, *et cetera*.' You'll be the dot after *et cetera*."

Agnes was the clever one in the family, and she was the homeliest. Mary was supposed to have the nicest disposition, while May was the undisputed family beauty.

"Well, Miss Wisenheimer, that's as good as teaching a bunch of brats all day, and I'm to make as much money nearly as you, and you've been teaching ten years."

"Seven," Agnes amended, with dignity.

"Well, what difference does it make—ten, twelve, seven? I'm to get thirty dollars a week."

"I don't believe it," Mary announced, from the window.

May bowed.

"Regular little old iconoclast," she said, pointing to her sister. May had recently heard the word, and had hoped for days to ring it in a conversation.

"When you use a new word, Infant, use it correctly," her brother admonished her, in his slow, rich voice.

May grinned at him. It was plain to see in which direction her sisterly affections pointed.

"Yes, father!" she mocked.

"Well, won't you have to keep dreadful hours, and work late nights?" Mrs. Reilly demanded. "Popper, do you think it's all right?"

"What do you say, Francis?" Mr. Reilly turned to his son, his face betraying his anxiety.

May stood tapping with her foot, impatiently, while the family oracle considered the problem.

"Well, if May can get up early enough, and manage to keep awake at night, I don't see the harm in her going on the stage," Francis decided. "The theater is a great influence toward good, and the presentation of high-class performances is educational and cultural. But that isn't the point here, of course. May is quite old enough to know what she wants to do, and if she isn't too lazy to work and to study she ought to make a career. Besides, since she has already gone out and obtained a job in spite of all we said against it, I don't see there is anything else to consider—"

He had more to say. The family listened respectfully, but May dived into his lap and hammered her soft hand against his mouth.

"Oh, Francis, what a darling you are! What a shame you're a priest, Francis! You'd make such a swell husband, and all the girls are just daffy about you!"

"May!" cried the mother, shocked beyond measure at such heresies.

"Well, he is too good looking to be a priest, ma! You're a darling, Francis."

She turned to her sisters, prepared to throw a family bomb.

"He knows ten times as much as you both together, and he doesn't put on the airs you do, either. Besides, if there ever were two dumb-bells who—"

"Now, that will do," Mrs. Reilly interceded, hastily and firmly; "there'll be no fights before supper. Go wash yourself, May; you look hot and dirty, and come down to the table. Then you can tell us the whole thing from the beginning."

IV

THE Reillys were about to sit down to eat when the front doorbell rang, and while Bridget waddled to the door, the family tried to guess who it could be at that hour.

"Who do you suppose it is?" May said, loudly. "Who always comes just as we're sitting down to supper to sponge a free meal?"

"May!" cried the mother. "Honest, it beats me where you get your freshness. How can you say such awful things about the boy when he loves you so!"

"Yes, you ought to be ashamed, May," chimed in Agnes as Bridget returned, followed by David Royden, the young surgeon of St. Michael's College Hospital. He was a tall, fair young interne, with mobile features, a cleft in his chin, and uncombable brown hair.

"Good evening, everybody! I hope I'm not disturbing you. I just had a minute after supper—and thought I'd run in."

He looked guiltily at May, who sat regarding him stonily.

"Now I know what fierce suppers the hospital serves; don't I know, though!" Mrs. Reilly remarked.

"You sit right down, David—and Bridget!" she called. "Bring David a plate, and a knife, and a fork. He's going to eat with us. Now don't you dare say no, David, and never mind what May said when you came in. She's only fooling."

"I wasn't fooling," May insisted, icily, as there was a general shifting of places to make room for the guest.

After supper they went into the neat back yard, where there were rosebushes, and irises, and hydrangea, and beds of cool-smelling mint, and comfortable wicker chairs, and a hammock. May and David had undisputed right to the hammock, where they spent many happy hours quarreling together.

"I love you," David said, gloomily, as May chattered about her career. "I want you to marry me. Honest, I'll let you go ahead with your career, and I'll never interfere with your freedom; but a girl on the stage needs a protector. Let me be your protector, May. You know I love you. I can't bear to think of you buffet-ing about, and meeting all kinds of toughs."

"Aw, you're talking through your hat," May interrupted, pushing him away. "You make me sick. I hate you. I tell you that a million times, and you don't seem to hear. You must be deaf. First you say you won't stop me in my career."

She paused to look at him in the pitying way one adopts with children or the weak-minded adult.

"And now you set up a holler about the stage. Let me tell you the stage is a great influence toward good, and the presentation of high-class performances is educational and cultural! Say, if my brother, who is a priest, says the stage is all right for a girl, then you can take a back seat."

"Darling, who said anything against the stage. Sure, it's a swell profession. I'm only saying that I love you, and I can't live without you, and I want always to protect you from everything and make you my wife. Why, I'll be a famous physician as soon as I finish my internship in that hole, and I'll have an office on Park Avenue, and all kinds of swell cabinets and things. And, oh, May, I love you so! And won't we have fun in a little home behind the office?"

May swung her feet and stared up at the purple sky, brilliant with stars. The fragrance of blossoming flowers came to them in little spurts of wind. It was quiet and dark, and May's face was luminous with a kind of exaltation.

She smiled mysteriously. "It all depends on what you call fun. I can see in those stars way up there that I'll be famous yet. I shall make a brilliant match when I marry. Actresses are always marrying Wall Street brokers and lords and counts."

The youth was desperate, almost on the verge of tears. "Oh, May, don't say that. Those people are never happy. They have no homes, no children, no religion, no decent life like we have. Besides, you know perfectly well you're too lazy to work as hard as actresses have to work to get ahead. You don't want to marry a lord or a count, May. Honest, May, they're all subnormal. I know. I see the statistics. You're going

to marry me, May. You know you are, May, I—"

Suddenly he ceased being oratorical. He grabbed her in his arms, and pressed his mouth against hers.

"Oh, I love you," he murmured. "God, I love you so! You say you won't marry me, May. I dare you say it!"

May half swooned beneath his kisses.

"I'll think it over," she gasped.

V

At ten thirty Monday morning, May Reilly marched into the theater through the stage door, past the ancient doorman. A rehearsal of the principals of the cast was in progress. Knees lazily crossed, the director sat, looking fresh and cool and remarkably unruffled.

Upstage a slim, elfin-like girl was going through a scene with an older woman, whom May recognized as Maud Grear, the leading character actress of the league. But the girl, May did not know. Could it be Ava Galt? That mousy, timid little thing? No, it couldn't be!

May edged in, and since no one paid any attention to her, she joined a little group of onlookers.

"Try that again, Ava"—then it was she—Bourk said in his pleasant way; "a little less bitter this time. Remember she is an illiterate child. All right, now—"

May shook her head in negation. No, Ava Galt wasn't much of an actress. May was certain she could do better than that. Could this really be a rehearsal, May wondered, perplexed? Somehow, she thought a rehearsal was necessarily with all the furniture and scenery in place, and with every one in costume.

Why, this Bourk was a rotten director! May's idea of good stage managership was gleaned from a motion picture burlesque where the director shouted through a megaphone, tore his hair, swore, and acted generally directorial. But this quiet voiced, pleasant man, directing on a bare stage while people strolled to and fro!

It was a mistake. Where were the newspaper men and photographers, the fashionable dressmakers and excited young press agents? This was no more like a theater than one of her father's funerals was like a picnic.

Suddenly she saw Mart. He was coming toward her ominously.

"Good morning, Wales," May chirped.

"Morning. Your rehearsal was called for two this afternoon."

"No, honest?" This in a voice of shocked disbelief. "And I rushed so to get here on time! I understood you to say eleven sharp! Well, anyhow, since I'm here, I might as well stay, don't you think so? I can learn by watching the others. I'd like to understudy her."

She pointed to Ava Galt, who was going through the scene in the same unexcited manner as before.

Mart hesitated. "Well, I suppose since you're here—all right, stay. Only, remember, if you make a sound, I'll lock you up in the property room. Not a sneeze out of you, now!"

May smiled archly, and nodded, gesturing as if suddenly stricken mute.

The rehearsal continued all morning. To May's jaundiced eye they seemed to get nowhere. Two hours—and they were still on the same scene! The acting ended abruptly, and the players drank lemonade from a galvanized pail. Then the scene continued, with two more players added, gradually leading up to what May presumed was the end of the act. It ended with a bang.

"Fine!" Clinton Bourk applauded, and Ava smiled and saluted the director as if he were an officer.

May turned to a dark, intense young woman next to her who had watched the proceedings with intelligent interest.

"I don't think Ava Galt is so darn good, do you?" she asked, confidentially. "If it weren't for the director she'd be nothing. I bet he likes her, that's why he gives her all that instruction."

The intense young woman coldly regarded May.

"How can you say that?" she inquired, sharply. "Ava Galt is a darling. She's the best actress of the younger set on the American stage. The critics rave about her. She's the most finished, most intelligent, most brilliant—"

May mumbled something: "Director likes her."

"Why shouldn't he?" the other asked icily. "She's his wife." She disdainfully turned away.

May looked after her perplexedly. It was incredulous to hear one actress praise another. She turned to a fair, smiling blonde beside her who had watched the players breathlessly.

"Who's that?" May asked, pointing to her recent informant.

"That? That's Gracia Holden, Miss Galt's understudy. Oh, don't you think mother is too thrilling as Mrs. Hajeth?"

"Mother?" May stared. "Whose mother?"

"My mother. Don't you know who I am? Maud Grear is my mother. I'm Elise Grear, and I've got my first part in this play."

May gasped. "What is this, anyway?" she thought angrily. "A regular family affair? You can't move without stepping on some one's intimate relation in this place!"

VI

THE players dispersed for lunch. May hesitated when she saw Martin studying a manuscript. She sidled toward him.

"Your highship," she said, "would you coach me in Miss Galt's part?"

"No, I would not, Duse," he said, without looking up.

"But, look, I've got talent!"

May cocked her head as she had observed Ava do, and then, although not quite accurately, she repeated two or three lines, her gestures and facial movements, even her voice, a careful imitation of the other girl's.

Mart looked up.

"Oh, come on, Wales, coach me. You never can tell. I might get famous, and then you could say you gave me my first chance. You said I had nerve. It's genius! Honest! You rehearse me like Bourk. Sit in his chair, and I'll get in the position the players were in, and you teach me the part. Just for half an hour. Ah, will you?"

She walked her two fingers up his sleeve, her shining eyes irresistible.

Now, before you can understand the motivation that prompted Martin Forrest to sit in Bourk's chair, and painstakingly teach May the first rudiments of acting, you must understand the Players' League. This is important.

They started simply enough as a semi-professional company in a converted barn on an obscure side street. Maud Grear, Clinton Bourk, and a few others had an ideal. They set about to destroy the theory that good plays were box office failures—and bedroom farces, musical comedies, and melodramas were the only shows that paid.

And their success marked the beginning of better plays in New York. Clinton Bourk, former college instructor, artist, actor, playwright, not only produced these plays, but made them pay. And one of his hobbies was the development of new talent.

Mart, Clinton's most ardent disciple, also was on the lookout for fresh material. On this fertile soil May planted herself, and tenaciously took root.

Her part in the play carried little exaltation. She was one of the country girls at the fair. She carried a little cowbell, and danced and romped about the carousels and amusement booths, and she had one single word to say. "Mitzi!" she shouted in chorus, as she ran toward Ava.

It was nothing, really, yet the girls were coached for hours in this simple piece of acting. May had to count the steps she took, and take the same number of steps each time. It was ridiculous and annoying, but she obeyed, and in every way tried to ingratiate herself with Clinton Bourk.

But he was either immune or blind. He treated her with the same pleasant impersonality with which he handled the carpenters.

One lunch hour, Bourk strolled in as Mart was coaching May. Bourk stopped to watch. May grew icy with nervousness, but she went on with a supreme effort to outdo herself. She knew the part perfectly. Bourk studied her in silence, then spoke to Mart in low tones. May sauntered upstage with assumed indifference while she burned.

"You don't mind, do you?" Mart asked. "She's a darn little pest, but she has talent, Clint. I don't know yet whether it's just imitative or really original, but she certainly has all of Ava's mannerisms."

"Go to it, by all means," Bourk replied. "She really may be something good. We were talking about her just this morning. Ava believes this youngster is wishing for her to break her neck or something so that she might play her part." He laughed easily. "But Ava wants us to watch her. She thinks there's something in this youngster."

They sauntered out. May stood by, sick with apprehension. Suppose Bourk put a stop to the rehearsals! And just when she was ready to step into the leading part, should anything happen to Ava, which, please kind fortune, would happen soon!

When Mart resumed the private coaching

next day, May took it to mean that she had the director's full approval, and she was the recognized understudy of Ava Galt.

This opened certain complications, since Gracia Holden was understudy of the star. Gracia took the matter to the director. This was four days before the opening! He laughed at her, cheerfully and in some amazement.

"Good Lord, Gracia, you're not jealous of the baby! She's Mart's protégée, and we are merely going to give her a tryout. One tryout will tell us, you know. But don't, please, take her bombasticisms seriously! She's the very devil for mischief, I know, but, as I say, we are only going to try her out, and if she has talent—if, I say—then we're going to put her in the new play."

VII

RUMORS floated thick as dust about the dressing rooms. May strutted like a turkey before Thanksgiving. At home, the Reillys were carried on the wave of feverish activity that flooded the theater on the opening day. Not even the star was at such a pitch of excitement as May.

It was a colorful little comedy drama with which the league opened the season at their new theater. May looked out at the sea of faces from the corner of her eye as she danced about the stage. It made her a bit seasick—those even white faces. It was like rocking on a choppy sea in a rowboat. She had to pull her gaze away. If she looked long at that breathing, pulsating mass—

There was plenty of applause. May enviously watched Ava Galt take the curtain calls. Wait! There would come a night, May exulted, when she would be out there bowing—her name in twinkling lights, her pictures in the newspapers.

She ached to bow before the audience, to bask in admiration. Oh, soon, soon. Everything was possible now that she had got that far.

Weeks drifted into months—one, two, three. And still "The Brimming Hearth" drew crowds nightly. Behind the curtain, the cast set back to enjoy a long run and steady work.

But May Reilly burned with impatience. Being an actress was as dull as teaching. The family no longer bothered to ask for news of the world behind the scenes. May and David slipped back into their old rou-

tine of kisses and quarrels, and were tacitly "keeping company."

She knew Ava's part down to the last shrug of the shoulders. Every performance found her staring with eyes full of resentment at the star.

"Darn her," May mused; "if she weren't so *darn* healthy!"

For, as long as Ava played the part, Bourk seemed to have forgotten all about May.

Ava Galt sat before the mirror in her dressing room. Her husband was stretched, incongruously, on the be cushioned laciness of the *chaise longue*. Ava powdered her neck with heavy hands.

"If I break down, Clint, it's because I can no longer struggle against that child. I tell you she has an evil eye. Did you ever notice how red her stare is?" She poised the powder puff, her lips twitching humorously. "I know she is praying that I break a leg so that she can play my rôle. It's frightful—the egotism and perseverance of her!"

"Both admirable virtues, dear creature," he answered lazily, sucking his pipe.

"Yes, yes. Do you include officiousness in your list of virtues? Oh, darling, how my head does ache?" She spilled some perfume from a cut glass phial and sopped it on her head.

"Do you want an aspirin, dear?"

"Thanks, no, it makes me too fluttery. Do you know, Clint, I actually think Gracia still is worried about her job! I've done all to assure her that she is my understudy, and that we are merely going to give the child a chance." Ava smiled indulgently. "You should have heard the kid boast and show off yesterday in the dressing room. You'd wring her neck, Clint, I'm sure you would. She has real Irish cheek!"

"She is a beauty, though—I wonder if she really has talent—Mart is all for this kid, and, as a matter of fact, Dilling likes her, too."

He smoked in silence for awhile.

"Smoke bother you, dear?"

"No," she answered, faintly, "it's all right. Well, for my part, I hope she makes good, but I do wish she wouldn't hate me so, Clint; it's awfully hard on my liver."

Her husband laughed, arose slowly to his feet, joint by joint, and walked over to his wife's side. She laid her head wearily against him, and he stroked the thick hair with tender hands.

"Darling, if she bothers you, let's chuck her out."

"Why, I wouldn't think of it, Clint! No; indeed no; give her a chance. If she's really an actress, I'd like to see her get ahead. If she isn't— Oh, my head, dearest, stroke it—harder."

Ava staggered into the dressing room at the final curtain, and collapsed in her husband's arms. Somehow, she got through her part, and only her husband knew how the neuralgic pains shot through her head—like white-hot steel.

May, leaning on David's arm, on the way home in the subway, burned with excitement. "If she doesn't get well, Dave, I'll play her part in to-morrow's matinée. Bourk said so! Oh, Dave, I'm on the eve of my career. Oh, Dave! To-morrow this time I will be famous."

David watched her gloomily. He knew that in these exalted moods he was no one but her escort to see her home, to help her with her wraps, and to be her audience. He was sick now with premonition; that ever-gnawing fear of losing her.

"What about me?" he asked, darkly.

"You!" she jeered. "You! Why, deary, I don't know you're even living!"

VIII

At twelve o'clock Saturday morning Bourk telephoned to Miss Reilly:

"Take a car here at once, May. I want to run over one or two points with you. Miss Galt is unable to take the matinée. Now, never mind, it's all right! I promised you—and now let's see what you can do."

"I'm sorry your wife is sick," May remembered to say, as trembling and bursting with joy, she hung up the receiver.

At last the Reillys were impressed. Mrs. Reilly and the girls rushed through the morning cleaning to be on hand for the matinée.

It was Martin Forrest's idea to notify the press. May was his protégée, and he believed he had discovered a great thing. When she reached the theater, the entire cast knew that she was to play Ava's part, and the air back stage was tense.

Outside, a tiny sign announced that, through the temporary indisposition of Ava Galt, Miss May Reilly would assume the rôle of *Mitzi* for the afternoon.

Mrs. Reilly wept softly as she stood in front of the little notice. "My baby," she crooned; "my baby, so famous!"

For May it was glorious! A reporter back stage to interview her. "Later!" cried May.

The girls of the mob—how they stared and envied—their shallow kisses. May laughed scornfully.

"Nervous? Me? Not a bit! I know the part better than Galt. Don't you worry about little May. I'm not the least bit nervous. Feel my hands. Aren't they warm and steady?"

The drop curtain rising—the dimming lights; dim, dimmer, dark. The curtain rising so gracefully. The hushy, plushy silence of the theater. The feel of the audience adjusting itself out there, fluttering—quiet.

On the stage, the merry fair grounds, the barkers, the girls jangling their cow bells. Now—now—

Bourk, Mart, Gracia, reporters, watching.

May bounded out, her head tossed back like a young colt. She was a vital, throbbing dart of color.

"*Mitzi!*" The girls rushed toward her. May poised, laughing, ready to speak. The girls fluttered back.

"I came; I told you I'd come." May spoke gleefully, conscious of her power.

Then a desire, stronger than breath, made her look at the audience. The consciousness of her adequacy, of her beauty—Were they getting it out there?

She looked again. Those rows of faces—awful faces, white, ghastly, rows and rows of ghastliness.

She felt nauseated, as if from rocking, choppy waves. All in a second—one second. She tried to pull away, to catch her lines.

Why had she looked? Oh, God! All in a second—it was too awful. She was lost, lost.

The curtain was down. Clinton Bourk was behind the stage.

All in a second, and all because her vanity made her look.

The audience, relieved from its embarrassment, tittered and broke into hoarse chatter.

Bourk was on the stage, announcing in his pleasant way that the play would be resumed at once, with Miss Gracia Holden, understudy to Miss Galt; and how sorry he was for the delay due to an error in casting.

No one ventured near May. The play-

ers stood about, staring wretchedly. She was crouching on a chair, sobbing noisily.

The play was on, and Bourk came toward her.

"You'd better go to your dressing room, May," he said, gently; "they'll hear you outside."

With her face covered with her hands, and her body shuddering with suppressed sobs, May went out of the hush that marked her exit from the wings.

"It was nothing but nerve, after all," said Mrs. Grear, the first to break the silence. "She's no actress, poor youngster; she's only a nervy little mimic—and she lost her nerve. Poor kid!"

IX

MAY huddled on a chair. Her sobs were spent, and now, somehow, she felt nothing but a great emptiness—like—like staring inside a drum.

She couldn't feel. It was all over. Her career, drowned in that awful second.

May squirmed in agony as she relived the sensations of that second.

"My career," she whimpered, "all over."

She tried to feel tragic, and discovered that she didn't feel tragic at all. Then for one lucid moment May Reilly saw herself naked, stripped bare of vanity—stark bare.

"You faker," she whispered to herself, then sobbed afresh.

"May, May, darling!" Some strong

man was lifting her up, so tenderly. May sobbed brokenly.

"Baby, mine," crooned his voice, "I understand. There's more in life than acting. It's living that counts. Don't cry so. I love you. Marry me now. We won't have much to begin on, but what difference does that make if we love each other?"

"David," she said, between sobs, "I—love—you. I don't care—about this—Oh, David! I'll go back to Normal—and teach till you're on your feet." There was a stab of recollection.

"Oh, David," she moaned, "what a fool I was to look! Did I look terrible that minute? Tell me the truth, did I look like a fool?"

"Terrible? Why, you looked beautiful! You looked so tragic, so beautifully young and frightened. I wanted to jump up on the stage and grab you in my arms and shout at the audience: 'You fools, can't you see she's frightened? Stop staring at her! She's mine, all mine. What right have you to stare?' That's how I felt, May. You looked like—like a saint!"

May cuddled against him, her tears drying beneath his kisses.

"Are you sure I looked like that? Because if I did, I really don't care so much. Did I really look like that? Honest?"

"You looked wonderful," he declared fervently; "beautiful and tragic."

"Well, I don't mind so much, now," she purred happily. "Kiss me again, Dave!"

COMRADESHIP

ON crags of spuming granite

The waves' long heaps were hurled;

Down endless sands the ocean

Went walking round the world.

Fronting creation's pageant

My small thoughts seemed a lie:

Clouds great as mighty cities

Sat in a windless sky.

I looked close for a comrade

And found him, with a smile—

An ant—lost—up a grass blade—

That waved his arms awhile!

Harry Kemp

"Billee, Billee—the Button!"

HERE WAS A MUSIC THAT HAD NO CHARMS TO SOOTHE
EVEN THE GENTLE BREAST OF CIVILIZED MAN

By Leslie Gordon Barnard

IT was young Bertrand who suggested it. He looked us up in our various haunts, disregarding the telephone as unreliable, and traveling himself from place to place at breakneck speed in a taxi.

I was lunching with M. Griggio, whose compositions you may recall as having won a measure of renown beyond the borders of his own land, for he was born in this country, although of mixed French and Italian parentage. M. Griggio was forever discussing the turning of a scenario of mine into a musical play of sorts, and always looking a little worried about the eyes as if in fear this tenuous thread might snap and he be thrown upon his own resources for just so many more lunches.

Well, there was Bertrand standing over us, and gesturing, in quite a foreign way, with a pair of hands incased in particularly "doggy" gloves.

"Don't move! Don't rise!" he implored us. "There are few things more indecent than breaking in upon a luncheon tête-à-tête—and, besides, I have no time for the formalities! You see me back from Europe for my usual month at home with my dear uncle. Thirty days' hard labor—fighting ennui—is the price of my care-free life at other times. Sometimes I wish he or his money would perish! One way I would get his fortune, and the other way a penniless freedom—but freedom! I have been forty-eight hours under his barren and hospitable roof. I am bored to extinction. I have come to my friends.

"You have"—he glanced at his wrist watch—"six hours to find costumes that will reduce your age to as many years. I am giving a children's party. You must both come!"

Relinquishing, with a sigh, my plans for a quiet evening, I gave in to him. It was

the easiest way with young Bertrand. Some feverish Parisian strain ran in him, too, and phlegmatic Anglo-Saxon blood might as well capitulate peacefully. Not so my friend Griggio. He shrugged his shoulders, and went dramatically into thought.

"Ah!" Bertrand cried. "I forgot, professor, you are at odds with my uncle's music!"

"Not at all! Not at all!" M. Griggio dissented, with a gentle sadness. "It is merely that his compositions do not suit my particular ear. They are—they are—"

"I know," Bertrand agreed, gesturing again; "they are, indeed! I find them so myself. Just like my beloved uncle—so unexpected at the wrong place. At the moment when you are getting along nicely, poof!—something gives way and lets you down with a thump, and the music goes on laughing mockingly at you. But I think, professor, you will not be troubled. My uncle is enormously busy with a new composition that is nearing the end—some amazing big affair, so I gather."

He laughed. "The ghosts—the spirits, you understand—I cannot guarantee. My good uncle insists upon them. I believe he has them in his new operatic composition, so doubtless he often sees them. I have not myself run across them. You will come then?"

We nodded, and he was gone like a vanished spirit himself. I laughed, but M. Griggio did not.

"What does he mean—ghosts?" I inquired, interestedly.

M. Griggio looked up with a start, his mild eyes on me quizzically.

"Have you not heard? The old place is supposed to be haunted."

He, too, gestured in his odd foreign way.

"M. Bertrand himself would tell you—"

but then what a joker he is!—that the devilish trickery of his music comes from outside himself. I myself have seen—"

He relapsed into silence.

"Seen?" I prompted.

"Strange things!" he replied. He brightened. "I shall go as Lord Fauntleroy. My figure lends itself, and with a little ingenuity my studio corduroys may be turned to the purpose. Would you honor me by sharing my taxi?"

I nodded gravely, although I knew the charge would fall on me.

"At a quarter to eight, then, if that suits," M. Griggio suggested.

II

THE Bertrand house sets well up on the slope that rises graciously above our city. It stands in grounds of proportions that made us feel young Bertrand did well to hold to the affections of his uncle. I had often heard the scapegrace say, that as a subdivision, it was worth a king's ransom.

The old gray house seemed to sit sullenly by itself among the upstarts that had grown about it with the spreading of the city. Immersed in his music, Uncle Bertrand let the grass run wild, the orchard fail for want of pruning, the flowers go to seed and intermingle with weeds in a scandalous Bohemianism of the earth.

Within, the house was gradually sinking into a magnificent decay. He always was going to have repairs made, but neglecting them, contenting himself with saying:

"When I am gone, Bertie can do with it as he pleases. Let us grow old together!"

As for servants, he abominated them. Train them as he would, they always interrupted at a critical point, and since he had nearly brained an unfortunate domestic who did not hear his warning rumble to "Get out—you!" he had hired a married couple—deaf mutes. They were particularly sensitive to pantomime, and could be depended upon to obey electrical signboards he had installed in their quarters and in the kitchen.

We were among the last to arrive, M. Griggio and I. Only with difficulty did I dissuade him, at the last moment, from giving up. His small apartment was littered with signs of struggle.

"*En bas*, Lord Fauntleroy!" he cried at sight of me. "Why should he wear a lace collar? How can one get lace without money? Consider this bureau drape—will

it suffice? No—no, I will not go. You think if you pin it there?—ah, that is clever! Bah! I am of all fools the greatest—a Lord Fauntleroy with a mustache! It is meant I should remain at home!"

In the end, I dragged the little man off, holding before him—like a carrot before a donkey—the prospect of refectations worthy of young Bertrand, the products of a proper pâtisserie.

"*Voilà!*" M. Griggio capitulated. "I will come, but it is flying, my friend, against the very nose of Providence!"

"You are thinking, perhaps, of the ghosts," I chaffed him; and then I revealed that Uncle Bertrand, although too busy to attend the "children's party," had promised he might raise a spook or two for them.

"He is quite a joker in his way," I added.

"*Peste!*" the little man cried, bouncing up and down on the seat of the taxi. "That is just the trouble with his compositions! It is sacrilege, the way he plays with music. And how many critics are fooled by it, crying, 'Bravo! Bravo!' where honest work goes begging! Bah!"

He suddenly swung toward me, waving his arms. "Let me out! I will not go to his house!"

"You are afraid of him, then?" I gently insinuated.

He almost fell off the seat.

"Afraid? Pah—I will go! I will slide on his floors, I will mark his walls, I will consume great quantities of his food! To-night I am a child," he tapped his costume, "without repressions."

"The house is just ahead," I reminded him, "and you must not forget that Lord Fauntleroy was an exemplary little fellow."

"A child with a mustache!" he grumbled, disconsolately.

He sank back into the gloomiest of silences and glowered.

III

THAT great, musty old place! A sense of desolation forced itself upon me at our entrance.

Young Bertrand met us at the door, a dashing Boy Blue, much given to a raucous blowing of his horn.

"Listen!" he would cry to arrivals. "You will be welcomed by the spooks!"

The house was a great double one, divided by a long corridor leading to a staircase that went both up and down. And

when Bertrand blew on his silvery horn, the notes seemed to hang in the air about us, and then go drifting down the corridor to splinter into a thousand mocking voices that arose and descended, as if the old staircase were indeed peopled by impish ghosts!

"But your uncle!" I said, horrified. My glance went to a great closed door on the left of the passage, where I knew the composer worked.

Young Bertrand shrugged his shoulders.

"Turn about!" he laughed. "The old boy's strumming drives me frantic sometimes; mine at least is musical."

He blew again.

"Anyhow, I think he is growing as deaf as the servants. He went into the studio at four thirty, and gave orders for no one to enter. His new composition is almost ready for the public, and, for the time, he is lost to us all. Come along."

One could hardly blame the nephew for trying to waken this sleepy old house. The electrical fixtures were of the earliest manufacture, and the great hallway was full of dim shadows. We followed down it halfway, and young Bertrand ushered us through portières to the left, into a really immense room.

Here, under a vague ceiling, and a dim illumination further diminished by Japanese lanterns, the children's party was about to begin. There were perhaps twenty of us in all, and mutually acquainted.

"Later," the youth declared, firmly, "you may dance, if we can drag the piano out of my revered uncle's studio; but for the moment the games of childhood must engross us!"

My memories of poor M. Griggio, as a melancholy Lord Fauntleroy—with mustache—changed by the exigencies of the game into a doleful Sally Waters; of him as the grease on the axle, revolving at every call but his own, in Family Coach; of his determination that we should play Post Office, for the little man was impulsive in his amours, and greatly smitten by Little Miss Muffet—these things must pass by as irrelevant.

Thus we come to that last great game of the party—what M. Griggio termed: "Bil-lee, Billee—the Button!"

"Any one got a loose button about 'em?" young Bertrand demanded loudly. "Never mind—I'll fetch—"

Somebody interposed: "Here's one, right in the doorway! I kicked it coming in."

It was a brown bone button, and we formed a circle to deal with it according to rule. M. Griggio, being denied Post Office, squeezed in beside me—as nearly opposite Miss Muffet as possible—and with eyes only for her and the two Buster Browns, who had, with twinly divination, ousted him from beside her.

One or two others, tired of the childish games, and anxious to be dancing, wandered restlessly about.

"Billy, Billy Button—who's got the button?"

We began the feverish circulation from one to another, hands behind our backs to receive and pass on.

"Billy, Billy Button—"

Round we went, shrieking out laughter, the one who was "It" making wild diagonal dashes.

I did not see two of the non-players steal out. They had gone to peep in the key-hole of the studio, with designs on the piano.

I did see them come back to signal to young Bertrand; and I heard distant sounds as of straining, creaking wood. But the game was fast and furious now.

"Billy, Billy Button—who's got the button?"

Young Bertrand's face seemed to hang suspended above us, and gradually we grasped the fact that something was amiss.

"That—that button!" he said, with a grave stammer. "Who's got it now?"

No one spoke.

"I'd like to have it—please!" He paused, then launched his bomb.

"My uncle—" he gulped. "My uncle is lying dead on the floor of his studio! We forced the door. There has been a struggle—a button has evidently been torn from his coat! If some one will give up the button we can make sure."

I stammered: "A brown bone button?"

"A brown bone button," Bertrand answered, solemnly. "Somebody—please!"

We looked at one another, a pale, dazed circle. But nobody handed out the missing object. The button had disappeared!

IV

Poor M. Griggio! One would have thought he had, indeed, seen a ghost. He remained—caught in the terrible, fascinating clutch of the thing—after the others had gone.

Young Bertrand, himself as pale as a

sheet, urged me to stay with him, refusing other offers of assistance. He permitted M. Griggio to remain, as one would humor a child.

"You know Dr. Terriss well," Bertrand said to me, appealingly. "Fetch him up directly, there's a good fellow. I've sent for our own man, MacPherson. We'll leave things just as they are until they come!"

His voice hoarsened. "I've been a fool, blabbing about what I'd do with the estate if the old uncle got bumped off—all in a joke—but people will talk. You can't stop silly gabble!"

He pounced suddenly on M. Griggio, and shook him. "What do you mean—staring at me that way—you little rat?"

"It is he who profits, yes—that is suspected!" the poor little man declared, as if his thoughts came up from some vasty deep, and oblivious, it seemed, to both the insult and the shaking.

Then, as if the word had reached and stabbed his consciousness—

"Rat—rat!" His teeth gleamed. "My God, no—but crazy fools, yes—dressed up—Boy Blue, Lord Fauntleroy with mustache; little kid from the family of Katzenjammer. And beyond the door—death!"

He began to giggle hysterically.

"Come, and we'll telephone," I said, catching his arm, and bringing him around by the need for action. His hysteria died on his lips, but we stood for a moment, listening tensely.

Echoes of that horrid giggle retreated down the corridor, were caught and thrown back by the impish ghosts of the great staircase, losing themselves, at last, upstairs and down, in faintly mocking laughter.

In my journalistic days, when he was deputy, I had done Coroner Terriss a considerable service, and I knew he would be quick to respond, now. He came right up, on the heels of the family physician.

Their evident amusement at our childish costumes quickly gave place to professional gravity at our news. We followed them into the studio.

M. Griggio caught my arm at sight of the still figure on the floor, the head a little matted with crimson in the light of a near-by globe.

The room was, like the others, immense, and even more severe. Four plain walls, scantily hung with pictures; a couch, a few chairs, and, in the center of the great space,

the desk where old Bertrand had worked, and, close by, a grand piano.

This instrument supplanted the upright model of his more modest days, which stood—open for use as well—against one wall. It was a memento with which he refused to part.

Entrance or exit to the room could be had in two ways only. There was the large oak door leading to the hallway, and a French window at the opposite end, opening onto a small balcony.

The third wall, forming part of the front of the house, was fitted with several high windows, quite overgrown with vines. The fourth wall was broken only by the couch and the upright piano, two small pictures, and a signal rope for the summoning of the servants.

The two doctors made a careful examination of the body. Dr. Terriss arose at last, and snapped his glasses into their case with a look of relief.

"Heart disease, gentlemen!" he pronounced. "A sudden seizure, not uncommon in men of his age—and, I understand from Dr. MacPherson, something to which he was subject."

"Correct," his confrere agreed.

"In falling, he evidently hit his head against the edge of the piano." Coroner Terriss touched the polished corner. "You will observe a slight trace of the accident here. I think it will be quite sufficient for Dr. MacPherson to give the usual death certificate—that is—" He paused and regarded us. "That is, unless you gentlemen have any reason to wish a more formal investigation?"

Bertrand coughed nervously, and glanced at me. M. Griggio, like a man transfixed, was staring at the body of his contemporary, and I knew instinctively that the focal point of his gaze was that missing button on the coat.

Then his eyes, too, forced themselves away and met mine—as if it were my place to speak.

Just why I made the gesture at that moment, I do not know, but some nervous impulse sent my hands into the ridiculous pockets of my child's costume.

My right hand touched something round and solid.

All I could do in that dazed moment was to shake my head quite stupidly. M. Griggio nodded in sympathy. Bertrand said: "I am quite in agreement!"

We lifted the body to the couch by the wall, and covered it reverently with a sheet that Bertrand fetched. Then the doctors withdrew for a professionally friendly chat.

Above the couch hung the silken bell-pull, or rather signal cord, with which the composer had been wont to summon his domestics. Bertrand pulled it now, and bade the woman who appeared, by means of gestures, to serve refreshment to the doctors. He stood in the doorway so that she could not see the couch.

He presently followed her, attending to the doctors, and finished with them as their host. They made their adieus and left. We heard their final cheerful "Good night" to each other, and the sound of their cars on the gravel driveway.

Bertrand rejoined us. He was shivering a little; a cold blast seemed to have entered with him. The house appeared suddenly of a new immensity; the atmosphere clammy as death itself.

He said moodily: "Well, should we have told them?"

"No! No!" M. Griggio snapped, with a suggestion of his former hysteria.

He controlled himself to declare: "All professional men—doctors, lawyers—in especial I may say musicians—are fools. It is better not. The button has gone. We will forget it!"

My hand went guiltily to my right pocket as he spoke, and now, again by a nervous impulse, I jerked it out.

And a little round object fell to the floor and went rolling across the uncarpeted, polished space, bringing up under the couch with its sheeted figure.

Bertrand sprang forward and picked it up. He stood with the little brown button in his hand, staring palely at us.

"It came from my pocket," I said soberly, steadying myself with an effort, "but how it got there you know as well as I!"

We continued to stare almost stupidly at one another, we three, caught in the immensities of the great old house, while the far, faint rumble of the city's life seemed to retreat still further. It was like a receding tide on a foggy day, when the shore is lost in shrouding mist, and only a little mysterious whisper comes from the sea.

V

"You understand," said young Bertrand, "it was undoubtedly *torn* from him. See!"

He drew down the sheet, and we gathered about.

"The cloth is old," the youth continued. "Like the piano, he would not discard it! I have no doubt the button, too, was loose, but it tore the cloth before the thread gave!"

M. Griggio broke from us with one of his quick impulses, and ran to the French window.

"Locked!" he cried. "Locked on the inside, as was the door! But, yes, you will observe—whoever pulled the button left your good uncle alive, M. Bertrand! For a man—I ask you—can he lock a door inside, lock a window inside, after he is dead?"

I hazarded: "Then, whoever it was fled with the button through the hall, and dropped it there!"

"No!" Bertrand objected, decisively. "At four thirty my uncle was alive. I saw him enter the studio, I spoke to him, and arranged that he should not be disturbed in there. It was then he made his joke that he might raise a spook for my children's party, though he would not attend himself. At six thirty the woman came in with tea, but he made no response to her repeated rappings, and she went away. Undoubtedly he was already dead."

M. Griggio could not suppress a gasp, but Bertrand paid no attention.

"Between those hours—four thirty and six thirty—I myself was in the library opposite, working out the details for to-night's affair, and reading when I tired of that. I could plainly see the studio door. If any one had come in or out, I should assuredly have noticed."

"That is true," I said, inanely.

"I present, therefore, another problem to supplement M. Griggio's," the youth announced. "Not only how did the window and door become locked behind the escaping party responsible for the button, but how came the button into the room yonder, and to the group playing the game?"

"And at last into my pocket!" I added.

A thought came to me.

"On one side of me," I recalled, aloud, "was our friend Griggio, here—on the other—bother—I don't remember!"

M. Griggio turned on me quite furiously.

"*Peste!* You do not mean that I—?"

He appeared so excited and upset, and at the same time so ludicrous in his Lord Fauntleroy garb, that, in spite of the sheet-

ed figure on the couch by the wall, I nearly burst out laughing.

"My dear man," I pacified him, "let us rather put it down to the spooks—the spirits who haunt—"

"Bosh!" Bertrand exclaimed, but his face was working. "Look here, you fellows, there's something damned queer about the whole business. I'm not much given that way, but this house—and—and everything—well, it's getting on my nerves."

He hesitated, and said almost shyly, "It's so confounded late, anyhow—you might as well—stay the night. I admit I should prefer it. It's well enough for you to joke—"

"God forbid!" I said. "With your uncle—"

"My uncle," he retorted dryly, "would be the first to appreciate that. It's not that. I mean," he waved an arm, "I mean—the other thing! There are queer circles in Paris—I've mixed in a little—rummy things, you know—occult. I'm not built that way, but it gives you pause sometimes. If you don't mind—"

We said we would see him through the night. The three of us made a round of the room of death—at times fairly touching elbows.

The high windows, protected sufficiently already by their heavy vines, were found all bolted within; the French window was quite secure.

We shut off the lights at last. A pale flood of moonlight at once crept in, and fell in a pool upon the floor at the bottom of the couch on which the dead man lay.

"He would rather lie so—in his beloved studio!" young Bertrand said in a low voice. "Come along!"

Somewhere in the house a clock boomed out the half hour.

"Half past twelve!" the youth observed, quietly. He closed the heavy oak door and locked it carefully, retaining the key.

Our footfalls, as we walked along the great corridor, were magnified by echoes into the patterings and shufflings of a countless multitude.

VI

DECLINING a separate room, M. Griggio shared mine, and the benefit was not all his. The place seemed to be—even with the window wide open—imperfectly aired; the sheets were damp with a quite ghastly perspiration! The unshaded electric bulb

cut the gloom, but in a stark and ineffectual way.

Left alone, I should have felt all the phantoms of my boyhood assailing me. M. Griggio's presence, although it was a nervous, chattering thing, was most welcome. His own timidity somehow increased my pitiful stock of courage.

The grotesqueness of our costumes, caught in a queer, nebulous way by the dusty mirrors, did not help. Bertrand brought night apparel for us, and a dressing gown of his uncle's with one of his own.

M. Griggio regarded the dead man's possession with concern, and was quite willing that I should use it. He himself, enswathed in young Bertrand's gown, looked scarcely less ridiculous than before—a Lord Fauntleroy—with a mustache—turned into a little, unshaven monk.

We climbed in between the clammy sheets. Bertrand stood with his hand on the switch until we were under the coverlets, then he shut off the light.

"You won't mind?" he suggested. "This room connects with mine—you won't mind if I leave the door open between? Thanks! Good night."

His figure, bathed in its lower portion by moonlight, remained for a moment, then disappeared.

That was my last impression, for the bed was deep and really comfortable, and, in spite of everything, I slept. When I awoke, with M. Griggio tugging at my arm in a terrified way, it seemed to me that Bertrand was still standing there, and that I must have dropped off only for a moment.

But the moonlight had now crept up, and was falling full upon his head. The expression on his face I shall not soon forget, awake or asleep.

It was one of utmost fear—not the fear that a threat of violence might produce, but that subtle thing—fear of the unseen, the mysterious—that grips and throttles, and sets the hair at the nape of the neck bristling, animal-like.

He came, with swift, silent steps, across the floor to the bed.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said in mechanical politeness, and then, with a catch in his voice: "There's something damned queer afoot!"

He gripped my arm. "You'd swear we locked the—the room up completely? No—no one could get in, could they?"

I shook my head. M. Griggio sat up,

trembling so that the whole great bed began to be affected into a quiver.

"The woman—Mrs. Moggins," Bertrand explained, "has just come and wakened me. She wasn't sleeping well, and once, when she was wakeful, just now— There's a signal right in their room, you know, so that *if he wanted anything in the night—*"

He paused, and my flesh crept most horribly.

"You understand," he went on in a low voice, "the signal shows, by a number, where the service is required—the dining room, the library, and so on. Mrs. Moggins saw a light when she awoke. *It was a call from the studio!*"

We threw on our borrowed gowns, M. Griggio refusing at first either to go or to be left, but in the end following—a quaking, unshaven monk.

We descended to the servants' quarters. There was the light on the signal board, showing at No. 7.

"The studio right enough!" Bertrand confirmed. "Well—we must investigate."

Ascending the stairs, we tiptoed along the corridor, unlocked the studio door with undisguised trepidation, opened it, and entered. The moonlight now had crept up from the foot of the couch on which the sheeted figure lay. It fell upon the recumbent, white-covered form, it touched the head—

"My God!" young Bertrand cried, snapping on the lights now. "Look! Look! His face! The sheet!"

He did not need to explain. We had completely covered the corpse with the sheet. Now, in the moonlight and the pale electricity, the face of the dead man was exposed, staring up calmly—almost with a smile, we fancied—at the signal rope just above his head!

We went over every inch of that room for possible exits, entrances, explanations. There was nothing to furnish the slightest clew.

We tapped the walls, and examined the floor. With the aid of a flash light, we peered under the couch on which the body lay, moved the other scant furniture—even to the pianos. There was nothing!

What we had expected to find I do not know. Our activities came from a desperate need for action, for investigation—a search for the material explanation of the unseen!

"I say," Bertrand declared at last, "if

this thing should happen again, we'll be right on hand. We'll lock the door, leaving the key on the outside, and watch from across the hall. I'll set Mrs. Moggins watching below for the signal, and let her bang the dinner gong—which we'll have handy for her—the instant it shows again."

To this we agreed.

I do not know how you who read this feel about it—whether I have made vivid our feelings to your perceptions and sympathies. I do know that as I write—even now—my scalp begins to prickle with the remembrance of that time of waiting.

The clock struck two, I recall, as we sat shivering in that great, cold, moonlit house, just within the library door. We began, I think, to doze a little in spite of our tenseness, when, suddenly, we were all alert. We had reason to be!

The piano in the studio began to play.

At first it was the halting, one-finger exercise of a beginner; then it began to gather body and meaning. The scattered notes became united in a racing arpeggio, down the scale, up the scale, down again—then stopped abruptly.

"Quick!" Bertrand cried, rallying our dazed senses; and at the same moment a fearful reverberation struck across the silence to dismay us.

With the inability of the deaf, Mrs. Moggins did not realize what a din she was making. The elder Bertrand had brought from his Far Eastern travel a queer, vibrating gong, and the old house seemed now to shiver with the weird, primitive music of it.

Young Bertrand sprang for the studio door, and we followed breathlessly. He flashed on the lights.

"It's trickery!" I exclaimed, for the thing hit me that way suddenly. "Your uncle is spoofing us! It's some uncanny joke of his!"

For there he was, lying on the couch, it is true, but with the sheet trailing on the floor, and only partly covering his legs. He was, for all the world, like a mischievous boy feigning sleep, but surprised before he could quite replace the covers!

The youth sharply clutched my shoulder. "I've seen queer things—and he—he said he might raise up a spook for us to-night, but—but—"

He hesitated, then sprang to his uncle's side, touching the body, shaking it, then beckoning us over.

"It's death, of course!" he said. "He's cold—cold. But look—look there!"

Young Bertrand's face was gray-blue itself.

The dead man was gazing up with what seemed to us a calm mockery. Above his head the signal rope was still swaying a little, as if the hand that pulled it had only just withdrawn its grasp!

"A current of air," I ventured, feebly, "might blow that!"

"Where from?" Bertrand demanded, and then, swooping forward to the desk that stood near the grand piano: "The same one, I suppose, that knocked these down!"

He stooped to pick up some papers that, since our last entrance, had fallen to the floor. One he clung to and let the others drop.

"His will!" he said, wonderingly. "He had it out—did he expect then—? I say, there's a blot here—a fresh blot. He was about to make some change."

We stooped over it. It was evident, from even superficial examination, that the blot was quite recent. It stood there opposite a clause that caught our instant attention: "to my contemporary, M. Griggio, my upright piano—"

M. Griggio's eyes grew big. He seized the paper and read it for himself.

"Oh, my poor friend! My poor friend, Bertrand!" he moaned.

Young Bertrand folded up the papers, piled them neatly, and said with a weary gesture: "Let's go to bed! I'm in a maze! Perhaps in the morning we'll be sane."

He drew a hand across his forehead.

"I am not one to believe silly things," he added, "but in the morning—in the morning I shall have my poor uncle's body removed to a mortuary. I shall dismiss the servants. I shall lock up this house, and give instructions for its sale!"

"Yes, yes!" M. Griggio cried, rubbing his hands nervously and blinking. "You are quite right."

Bertrand went swiftly over to the two pianos in turn, shutting them up. He left the room and returned with two rugs—he threw one over each of the instruments.

I shivered, for the sight of the sheeted musician, and the two instruments thus covered, struck me cold.

"To-morrow," he repeated gravely, returning to us and preparing to lock up the place again, "I shall vacate, and put up

the house and furniture for sale by auction. Your piano, of course, will be sent over to you, M. Griggio!"

"The piano!" the little man exclaimed. "But no—no—no! I cannot! I will not! What if his spirit came there to play? Oh, *mon Dieu! Monsieur*, you do not understand my feeling!"

Bertrand stared at the pitiable, cringing figure, the protruding eyes, the sweating brow; and suddenly he turned on me a curious, reflective look.

"Nevertheless," he said, crisply, "it is my uncle's wish, M. Griggio. And the piano will be delivered to your apartment!"

VII

M. GRIGGIO had luncheon with me on the day the piano was removed.

"So small a place, and two pianos!" he groaned. "But what shall I do? From a dead friend—there are the decencies, are there not? And young M. Bertrand is insistent!"

He fanned himself agitatedly with a menu card. I remember it as an exceptionally sultry day; my own spirits were so depressed by the atmosphere that I made no attempt to rally the little man, except by an indolent mention of my scenario that he was to transform into a musical play.

"*Peste!*" M. Griggio cried. "That stupid thing!"

So I knew that even my luncheons were, for the moment, uninteresting to him. I might have snapped the tenuous thread of our noon hour relationship then and there, but for an almost annoying fondness I had for him. He wiped my soup from the ends of his mustache, and glared up at me.

"You should have got him to do it—before his genius was taken from the world! His fripperies and trickeries might have garnished its stupidity! Pah! This cheap napkin tastes of starch!"

"To-day, only to-day," M. Griggio continued, throwing the offending napery aside, "I have learned of it! His new composition—to be posthumously produced—I know how it will be—the critics will proclaim it as superb, bemoan the cutting off of genius, and silly women will read the reviews and weep and buy, and our young friend Bertrand will make a fresh fortune. So much for the dead."

"Speak well of those who have gone before," I said, sententiously.

"What of the living?" he demanded,

miserably. "A small apartment, and two pianos on which to play compositions unacclaimed by any but a few fine souls in a world of crazy banalities! Bah! I wish I were dead!"

And there, at that moment, was young Bertrand, standing over us, just as he had on another eventful day, save that his gloves were now a modest gray with broad black braiding.

"I have but a moment," he said. "Such a life, adjusting the estate! No time even to read my mail."

He pulled a bundle of unopened envelopes from his pocket in confirmation.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Here's one in the handwriting of Mrs. Moggins—what do they want? I paid them off generously. Well—" He thrust the bundle back into his bulging pocket. "The workmen commence to-day to tear the old place down. It is to be subdivided without delay. Your piano, professor, will arrive some time this afternoon!"

M. Griggio looked as if he just restrained himself in time from committing an atrocity.

"I shall do myself the pleasure," Bertrand added, regarding M. Griggio sharply, "of calling this evening to see that it has been installed to your liking in your apartment, my friend!"

M. Griggio's eyes flashed up, but his bow of acquiescence was perfect.

"If M. Bertrand can spare the time," he said, "from the arduous duties of turning his poor uncle's estate to account. His death has served you well, M. Bertrand, is it not so?"

The young man shot me a quick glance; his face was pale and moving.

"To-night, then," was all he said, and hurried off.

M. Griggio put a hand on my arm.

"You will not fail me, my good friend?" he appealed. "You also will come to me—perhaps for a light meal at six, if you do not mind my bachelor cooking? I do not wish to be alone—with that man!"

I saw that he was really agitated, and agreed. Indeed, he must have wanted me badly, for I had never before been invited to share his bounty. The reason for this I discovered on my arrival. I had no previous idea how close to penury the little man was.

"It is no use!" he said, growing voluble over his scant preparations for the meal. "What is it that a few of the great—in-

ternationally—acclaim one? It is the public who control the purse strings. If I wrote tricks and fripperies—"

He had an apron tied over his suit; his tie had gone askew; perspiration ran down his thin cheeks. "You do not know what it is, perhaps, to envy—to envy—" His face was tragic; before my questioning glance he controlled himself.

"I am thinking of our young friend, Bertrand," he said. "So much that he will have—everything; and for me—a small apartment and two pianos!"

He shot a glance at the bulking object shrouded in canvas, against the wall of his little studio. He shivered. The stormy sky outside the window, that gave on a well-like court, was not less sulphurous with the coming of darkness.

Bertrand arrived quite early in the evening. "It's an indecent hour!" he apologized. "But it's going to storm like the mischief before long. Ah—I see it got here all right! You haven't opened it yet."

He went over and touched the canvas shroud.

"If you don't mind," he said, politely, "we'll open it up and see if they misused it at all! It hasn't been touched since—that night!"

Perhaps, if the atmosphere had not lent itself, we should have felt better about it. But we shared, we three, a recurrence of that queer, shivering apprehension that the eventful night of the elder Bertrand's death had left us in.

For young Bertrand's face held a certain fixity of expression, and a pallor only exceeded by poor M. Griggio's, whose fingers worked with a desperate, fumbling haste over the fastenings. My own heart, in the stillness in which the earth seemed caught, and we with it, beat out its uneasiness like an ill-regulated clock.

The canvas shroud fell away, and the old upright piano stood exposed. It looked very innocent, and a bit shabby and somewhat shrinking beside M. Griggio's more modern instrument.

And yet I was sure, from the way Bertrand opened it and flicked imaginary dust from the keys, and how M. Griggio stared at the thing with smoldering suspicion, that they believed the ghostly music of that other night—that hesitating touching of the notes, that furious arpeggio trailing up, trailing down—had come not from the grand piano of the elder Bertrand, but from this unostentatious instrument.

But there was another subtle presence with us. Where the spirit came from, I did not quite know, but there it was—a deadly antagonism between young Bertrand and the little musician. Their eyes sought and held each other, like the rapiers of fencers, feeling the way, testing out strength and weakness.

Standing aside, I saw it all, and watched something like mockery grow in the one, and something like fear grow in the other.

"Perhaps you will try it out, professor?" Bertrand inquired at last.

"But—but no—"

"Just what are you afraid of?"

The rapier was searching for a hidden weakness. M. Griggio appeared to wilt, but he shrugged his shoulders, set a stool before the piano, and touched a key—a little, I thought, like a cat setting a tentative paw on an object of which it is not quite sure.

It was a bass note, and, as if the universe had been waiting for the signal, the storm leaped upon the city. A blinding flash of light filled the court area; there was an explosive crackle, and the lights went out.

M. Griggio sprang away from the piano as if, with that touch, he had, indeed, precipitated the thing.

By the light of successive flashes we found a single candle, cut it in two, and with the aid of saucers provided ourselves with a feeble light. We sat around, for the most part in silence, until the storm had rolled itself away to the east.

"Well," Bertrand remarked, "that's that! We can have our music now!"

With what seemed to me a calm impertinence, he took the candles off their saucers, and set one on each side of the piano keys. M. Griggio arose as if hypnotized, and went to the piano again. His white, sensitive fingers hovered over the keys; they descended—and a curious scattering of notes resulted.

We saw him start back, touch a key speculatively, another, another—no sound came! A shiver ran down my spine. I glanced at young Bertrand; his face in the candle gleam was full of mystification touched with fear.

M. Griggio seemed to gather all his courage together. He drew his right hand with a sweeping motion from treble to bass—and the scattered notes became united in a racing arpeggio. Down the scale it swept, and up again!

In a terrible fascination his fingers ran, his solitary little diamond glittering like an evil eye—up—down—and only those notes would play that had made the sweeping arpeggio of the room of death!

It seemed to sweep M. Griggio along, up he went, down again, until my head reeled.

"Stop!" I cried. "For God's sake, stop!"

He spun round on the stool, clapped his hands to his head, and stared at us. Then he got slowly to his feet.

"You heard—it—too?" he said, almost stupidly. "His trickery again—his trickery—the people fell for it while he lived, and now it follows—follows—"

He faced young Bertrand, pointing. "Don't look at me that way! I—I pulled that button from his coat, telling him to his face he was a joker with a sacred art. It fell on the floor and lay there, the brown button from his coat. Yes, yes—it was my fault—I killed him! It is true. It was I, M. Griggio, who is true to his art—in poverty. It was I who killed M. Bertrand, the musical trickster!"

VIII

I DO not know how long we sat there, young Bertrand and I silent at the confession; little M. Griggio huddled in an emotional heap in an armchair. Now that he had wormed it out of M. Griggio—after a groping suspicion, as he afterward confided—the youth seemed as horrified as I myself was.

But when he spoke, it was to ask a curious question.

"The button, M. Griggio," he said. "You say you saw it on the floor. You picked it up, then, and brought it away?"

The little man looked up, and, as if he had exhausted his emotion, his face became a mask.

"It was on the floor," he replied. "There I left it." He got up and started to pace the room.

"You must understand," he continued, "it was when you told me, that day, of the new composition that was to be so great, something snapped in me. I thought 'Here he will be great again—money—everything! I will go and see for myself what he has.' He handed me the finished composition. I had but to glance—there were the tricks, clever as the devil—jokes on the thing I love! I called him names. I threw his papers on the floor and stamped

on them. He tried to interfere; I caught at his coat like a crazy man—the button came off in my hand. Then I—I ran away—I saw him calmly close the French window.”

Young Bertrand cried: “Then you left him—alive!”

M. Griggio stared. “I left him so, but his heart could not stand such things as I had done.”

I think we both cried together: “But you did not kill him!”

“Because of me he died,” M. Griggio declared simply. “Has not his spirit followed me—to taunt me—after death?”

“By gad!” Bertrand exclaimed. “The piano!”

We both ran to it, and he lifted the top.

“Look!” he cried. “One of my poor uncle’s little jokes. The notes are muffled inside, all except those that make the arpeggio. Anybody passing a hand along the keys would get the same result!”

I said grimly: “At two in the morning, in a locked room, occupied only by a corpse, what hand was it that played the arpeggio? Answer that!”

M. Griggio came suddenly to life.

“Ah, it was different—that arpeggio! Like this, see?” He ran his hand in a skipping fashion down the notes. “Irregular—so! You see?”

Bertrand caught him by the lapel. “That button, professor—you left it on the floor. How, then, did it get into our friend’s pocket?”

M. Griggio looked confused.

“I put it there,” he confessed. “I had it when you came to tell us—of your poor uncle—and I was frightened. I slipped it in the nearest pocket—it was my friend here, who always helps me out of scrapes!”

“But how did it get out of the studio?”

M. Griggio shrugged his shoulders.

“And how,” I broke in, “did the signal go twice, and the sheet move off the face of the dead man?”

We stared at one another, with a little prickling sensation returning to our scalps. Suddenly Bertrand leaned over the keys of the piano.

“What the devil,” he cried, “is this on the keys, stuck in between, and in the corners?” A greenish, powdery stuff, like dried herbs, it was.

“I’m a fool, a blind fool!” he exclaimed.

He snatched an envelope from his pocket and pulled out a letter. “From Mrs. Moggins,” he said. “A request, if I will be so kind—but here, I’ll read the part:

“In closing up the studio we found a favorite kitten of your poor uncle’s—a lively little thing, but half starved. It used to spend most of its time in under the couch, where, the lining being torn, there was a good hiding place. It was a timid thing, except with your uncle, and it used to play about in a great way when he was alone. We took the liberty of taking the poor thing along, thinking he’d like it well looked after.”

“We are three fools!” Bertrand cried. “My uncle wins after all, with his spooks! There’s the button, found by some one in the hall outside, and there’s a crack under the door—and did you ever notice the fascination of a crack to a kitten with a loose object to play with? And there was the signal rope, tempting in the moonlight, an easy jump for a kitten from the sheeted figure—swaying the second time.”

“Aha!” M. Griggio exclaimed, relievedly.

“But the music?” I interrupted.

He grinned.

“That was the only prepared part,” he said, “and quite typical of my uncle’s jokes. No doubt he intended to come out of the studio—and behind him the ‘ghostly’ piano would be playing. Come here!”

He caught my arm, and led me to the instrument.

“Catnip!” he announced. “Scattered from one end of the keys to the other. An irregular arpeggio for the kitten to race over in its ecstasy.”

THE FAUN

If you come in springtime when the rain is on the grass
And the sun is on the rain, and if you are a lass,
You will hear me piping among the blossomed thorns;
And the blossoms hanging will hide my golden horns.

You will see my earth-brown eyes and hair like ripened grain,
And my fingers on the reeds moving swift as rain.
You will hear my piping and love me as you pass,
For you will not see my hoofs cloven in the grass.

Gostwick Roberts

The Plum Tree

THIS SMALL DAUGHTER OF EVE SCORNE THE APPLES OF EDEN—BUT THERE WAS A RARER FRUIT

By Anne Duffield

ALICE was beating the big gong in the hall as the children came down the wide shallow stairway.

Jerry came first, small and stocky, clattering in his little stout shoes, then Vera, slender and trim, stepping with her usual dainty precision, and, a stair above her, Marget, holding tight to Vera's hand, bunched and sweet in her starched pink frock.

The flagged hall led into the breakfast room whose long French doors opened onto the garden. Mother was in the garden. Mother had on her striped gingham dress, green stripes melting into silver-gray stripes. It rippled in the sunlight as she moved across the grass.

All the children loved that dress; Jerry, because his mother looked so pretty and young in it; Vera, because it was cool and crisp and fresh, and Marget because it made her think of tall reeds rippling in pale water. She made a little song about it, standing in the low white doorway:

"Thin green reeds, thin green reeds,
Waving in the water—"

Mother cut the last rose and drew off her loose gloves.

"What are you singing, baby?"

"A song about your stripy frock."

Mother laughed. "Funny thing," she said, and stooped to kiss her. Vera kissed her, too, and so did Jerry, quickly, on the tip of her little questing tilted nose, when the two others had gone into the house.

"Silly!" he thought—but what a kid she was. You had to kiss her, somehow, when she looked up at you like that with her eyes so blue and the sun on her gold hair.

They were all three golden children, although with marked differences. Brown-gold for Jerry, a thick and splendid mop;

silvery-gold for Vera, fine and straight, framing her delicate pointed face and falling like a glittering silken veil to her slender waist; and for Marget a red-gold crown, cut in a thick fringe across her wide white forehead and curling inward against her beautiful firm neck.

It was father—father—"asleep in France," as Marget said—who had given them their gold, and to Jerry and the baby he had given his dark-blue laughing eyes. Vera's eyes were like mother's, luminous and gray and widely set, with short, thick, very black lashes.

Vera's eyes were even more beautiful than mother's, for they hadn't any little crinkles around them, but mother's had a glow and sparkle that warmed you just to look at, while Vera's were as cool and as aloof as a moonlit lake.

The breakfast room was flooded with sunlight, and the table reflected it. Marmalade and honey, deep-yellow butter, lightly browned toast—everything caught the sun this summer morning.

Beyond the grass plot were the gay flower beds, and beyond the flowers glowed the old mellow wall whose rosy bricks had soaked in the sun of three hundred summers. There was a heavy, oaken, nail-studded gate in the wall, bolted on neither side, but it was never opened for any one to come in or go out.

The gardens beyond were of legendary beauty, but not one of the children would so much as peep through the gate, so deep was their dread of the man who lived there. It was said that he hated children, this big handsome man with the angry, unhappy eyes; rumor had it that he had beaten unmercifully a child caught poaching in his wood.

Certainly he was cruel to his wife—every

one knew that. You had only to look at the poor, milk-faced thing.

The children had seen her in church, sitting always alone in the shadow of a pillar. They watched her—everybody watched her—furtively.

Mother used to speak to her pleasantly after mass, and the poor young lady would smile wistfully at the children as if she would like to speak to them, but she never did.

The gate in the yew hedge clicked, and a brisk step was heard on the gravel path.

"I expect that's Miss Meeking," mother said.

Vera had already risen in her graceful, sedate way, and was tying on her broad, shady hat.

"I'm going to the convent," she announced. "Mother Gertrude wants to see me about the infant Children of Mary."

"Oh, V. V.!" Marget protested. "Not on Saturday!"

"Yes, on Saturday," Vera returned in her gentle, inexorable voice; "but I'll play with you this afternoon, baby."

The slender, exquisite child moved away across the grass. Mother stood watching her.

You could see, at a glance, what would be the end of Vera. Those cold, sweet eyes, the spiritual face.

II

ALICE, the maid, came out through the doorway. Alice was slim and pretty; she wore a lilac gown and a crisp cap with streamers. Her long, dark eyes met Marget's, a sly and roguish glance that implied: "We understand each other, you and I."

"Miss Meeking has come, ma'am," Alice said, primly.

Miss Meeking was in the sewing room. She was round and short, and smelled of camphor and black dye. Her stubby fingers were seamed and crisscrossed with innumerable little dark lines, although her hands were quite clean.

They tickled your neck while Miss Meeking snipped and tacked, her mouth full of pins, breathing very hard through her nose. She was bustling and chatty, and always full of news, and she called mother "Sylvia," because she had known her when she was a little girl.

"Well! Well! Well!" Miss Meeking cried, as mother and Marget came in. "Isn't this a morning!"

Marget curled herself up in the broad window seat, and took her tiny thimble out of a gay chintz bag. Mother and Miss Meeking were at the big table, spreading lengths of pink and blue muslin. *Snip, snap*, went Miss Meeking's great shears.

They were talking. They had forgotten Marget.

"I expect he'll take all the prizes as usual," the dressmaker was saying. "Odious man!"

Marget knew that they were talking of the fruit and flower show, and of Sir John, the man who lived next door.

"Can't understand it," Miss Meeking went on, "to keep it up all this time. It's three years since the baby died."

"I think it really unbalanced his brain," mother suggested.

"Then his brain must have been very unsteady to start with," Miss Meeking returned, vigorously. "And that poor, pretty fool—what did he expect? He knew what a silly, feckless thing she was when he married her."

"Of course," mother agreed, doubtfully; "but it was an awful shock, Sophia. Any one might have seen how ill the baby was—and he had forbidden her to go to the dance."

"That baby would have died in any case. Her leaving him that night made no difference."

"Yes, I know," Mother sighed. "But still, to come home from London and find her gone—and little Ralph dead—"

Snap went Miss Meeking's scissors.

"We'll get enough out of this for sashes, Sylvia," she said. "Yes, I know, it was dreadful. But to keep it up all this time!"

"Why didn't he forgive her, and get himself another baby?" she finished, hardily.

"I don't know. I can understand it in a way. And I've always thought that if she had stood up to him more—if she hadn't taken the attitude of a whipped dog—but, poor soul, she was always a shy, timid thing for all her gayety, and I suppose he broke her heart."

"Heart and spirit both," Miss Meeking agreed, "and as if that's not enough, he turns against children. Well, I suppose he serves the Lord's purpose some way, though I don't see it myself. Give me that skirt, Sylvia, I'll run it up."

Whir, whir, went Miss Meeking's machine; *whirr-irrrr!* The warm air, laden

with the scent of stocks, drifted in at the open window. A great yellow bumblebee blundered against the casing, and went droning on.

Marget's eyes followed him dreamily, and dreamily rested on the old wall drowsing in the sun. What was it that lay beyond? What happened behind the wall, in the silent gray house?

Supposing the gate should open? The gate opened!

A woman fluttered through; Sir John's wife. Marget could see the white face and the nervous, ineffectual looking hands. She came quickly between the rows of stocks, across the grass, and disappeared beneath the window. A moment later Alice appeared at the sewing room door.

"Lady Bathurst to see you, ma'am," Alice announced.

Lady Bathurst was sitting in the big chintz chair by the white fireplace. She arose nervously as mother came in; and smiled her wistful smile at Marget, who had sidled in after mother.

"Mrs. Sinclair," she began, breathlessly, "our fruit trees are so laden—the ground is quite covered with plums, and apricots, and peaches—they'll only rot there. I wondered if your children—"

Mother sat down. She put out her hand and drew Marget to her side and held her there. Lady Bathurst sat down, too.

"You mean," mother began—and Marget noticed how gentle her voice was—"you would like the children to go in and gather some of the fruit? It is very kind, but—"

"Sir John is away," the other put in, quickly. "Not that he'd mind, of course! It—it would make me very happy."

"It's wonderful fruit," she finished lamely.

Mother turned to Marget. Her eyes were very bright. You could see that she wanted Marget to go.

"Would you like that, baby?"

"Oh, yes, please, mother."

"Then run and find Jerry. Be quick."

Marget dashed away.

"I say!" Jerry exclaimed, when she found him out by the rabbit hutch. "The enchanted garden! But what about the Ogre?"

"He's away. Oh, Jerry, do come! It's an *adventure*!"

The magic word scored. Jerry jumped to his feet.

"All right," he said, "come along with me, young un."

III

THE garden was all that they had dreamed. The red wall inclosed it on three sides, and on the fourth, stretching away into the distance, was the apple orchard, a place of dim aisles whose arches were the fluttering leaves and whose columns the gnarled, fantastic trunks of age-old trees. The grass was short and thick, and intensely green, intersected by narrow, red, stone-bordered paths.

Peach trees, and apricots, and figs grew close against the wall, their branches trained back and spread out over the warm bricks. Other trees were planted in the grass, running out like the points of a star, and in the center of the star, ringed by a smooth plot of green turf, stood the plum tree.

It was a very little tree, pruned and clipped to the last possible degree; it had a small wall all to itself, guarding it on the east and north. Its leaves were lanced and narrow and dark, and it bore on its tremulous branches six perfect plums—plums as large as lemons, golden-yellow, with a faint pink flush on their satin cheeks.

"Now, children," Lady Bathurst said, "you can have all the fruit that is on the ground, and you can shake the trees a little—not hard—but don't touch—don't go near the yellow plum tree in the center. Do you understand?"

The children understood.

"Sir John is showing those plums, both here and in London. There are no others like them in England. You won't go near them, will you?"

Jerry smiled up into the anxious brown eyes. "Of course not," he explained. "Not even onto the grassplot."

Lady Bathurst watched them a moment—they were afraid she was going to stay—but she fluttered off in her uncertain manner. Then they were alone in that heavenly place, chattering like two busy magpies; but neither Marget nor Jerry was thinking either of what they were doing or what they were saying. They were thinking about the plum tree.

There it stood, in the center of the star. All the little red paths led to it, all the trees branched from it.

Suddenly, hand in hand, without having spoken of their intention, they were stand-

ing at the edge of the forbidden grass. Could they really be plums, those great golden balls? What did they taste like?

"Nobody 'll ever know," Jerry said, gloomily; "they're only for the show."

And then, even as he spoke, one of them fell with a soft *plop*. Marget pulled her hand from Jerry's.

"No, no, baby!" he cried, sharply; but in a flash Marget was under the tree and had caught up the fallen fruit.

"She *said* all that were on the ground," the child murmured, and set her teeth in the lovely thing.

Those friars of ancient Spain who had perfected such plums, and brewed from them a secret and terrible liquor, knew what they were about! But never, in all the years, had those sweet and potent drafts gone to the blood and brain of any who drank more surely than did the unfermented juices of that one which had fallen in an English garden, to the blood and brain of Marget!

"Oh, Jerry!"

Jerry was watching in horror.

"You'll be sorry—you naughty, naughty girl!" And then, irresistibly: "What was it like?"

"Like—like eating sunshine!"

"You *are* a loony," Jerry said. "You might have given me half."

"Oh, I wish I had! But I didn't think. It was so wonderful."

Jerry was slowly advancing, his eyes on the beautiful fruits that dangled on their frail stems scarcely higher than his head.

"I wish another would fall."

He touched the tree.

"Jerry!"

"Well, you had one." He gave the tree a tiny shake. A second plum fell.

Jerry pounced, and in a twinkling it was gone. Then panic seized him.

"Come along!" he cried. "Let's get out of this. I expect we're in for it! Anyhow, he's got four left for his beastly show."

But Marget did not move. Sin had entered into Marget's heart. Deliberately, with an awful precision, she put up her hand and plucked the third plum.

She ate it slowly, her blue eyes fixed upon her brother, who was staring back at her. The kid was mad—he must drag her away, carry her, if need be, kicking and screaming—but he couldn't do it.

A dreadful fascination was drawing him closer and closer to the tree.

The great, nail-studded gate had slammed, the children with their heaped basket were gone, and the garden dreamed in the yellow evening sunlight. The peaches, and the apricots, and the red and purple plums spread their proud branches heavy with fruit; but the tree in the center stood denuded, stripped of its glory, its down-tipped branches seeming to stare forlornly at the six long, egg-shaped stones that were scattered upon the ground at its feet.

IV

It was dreadful! Early in the morning Lady Bathurst had been to see mother. Marget and Jerry had heard her crying in the drawing-room, her voice thin and high, and saw her running across the lawn, and caught a glimpse of her white, frightened face as she slipped through the old gate.

And then mother and Vera had come to them, mother with very pink cheeks and with her lashes caught together in little wet points, Vera paler than ever, with her lovely mouth set in a straight thin line. Oh, what a dreadful day!

Jerry had gone to his headmaster. "I'll write a note," mother faltered, but Jerry had said: "No, I'll tell him myself," and he had gone off alone, walking very straight, his blue eyes wide and bright. Marget was left alone with mother and Vera. Vera was terribly shocked and very angry; mother, upset and bewildered.

"I can't understand it," she kept saying. "How *could* you, Marget?"

And Marget couldn't tell her. How could she make mother and Vera understand that she *had* to eat the first plum, and then *had* to go on eating them? How could any one who had not tasted them understand? You couldn't explain it.

She stood before them, dumb and rosy, twisting her little, wicked, thieving hands—it was Vera who called them that—and all she could say was:

"I did it—it was me—I made Jerry eat them."

"Oh, Marget!" mother said, with a laugh that was half a sob. "Of course it was you. It always is!"

And Vera had pushed Marget's beseeching hands away, and had gone out of the room.

At luncheon things were no better. Jerry had not returned. Mother, still flushed, sat silently at the head of the table. Vera,

pale and stern, sat like a figure carved against her high-backed chair. Marget, tearful, yet still unrepentant, stared at her across the dark, polished table.

And when the pudding came on—Marget's favorite pudding, rich and creamy—mother said, sadly: "No, Alice—Miss Marget will not have any pudding."

Alice was the perfect servant. She did not toss her head or bang the plates, but her sly, black eyes sent Marget a look of passionate championship as she closed the door with a quiet that was more significant than the sharpest slam.

"Makes me sick, it does," Alice muttered in the kitchen. "Such a fuss. What did that silly wisp of a woman expect, leaving them two alone in her garden? Of course they ate his plums, and serve him right, too! And here's the mistress been crying her eyes out, and Miss Vera sitting like a plaster image—"

"Miss Vera's a saint," the cook interrupted. "Religious, she is, and she feels it terrible."

Alice sniffed.

"To see that baby looking at her with them eyes of hers that 'd melt a stone—"

"I've made her a treacle pastie," the cook put in, hastily. "You see she gets it, Alice. As for Miss Vera, she loves her sister better than she does her own mother, and that's why she's so upset."

"I could do without that sort of love myself," Alice retorted, and she banged a saucepan.

A dreadful day, long and lonely, but by tea time things were better. Jerry had returned, chastened, but at peace, and mother had forgiven both of them when they all gathered in the chintz hung drawing-room where the tea table was drawn in front of the wide flower-filled fireplace.

Only Vera still held aloof; austere and lovely, she sat in the window seat, reading. Mother glanced at her now and then. She herself could never have kept it up like Vera, but she understood her. Mothers do.

V

SUDDENLY Alice appeared at the door.

"Sir John Bathurst!" she announced, breathlessly.

Mother gave a little startled exclamation, and Marget scuttled to her side.

Then the training of years fell from Alice. She gulped loudly, and said in a sort of burst: "Miss Marget, I want you—

cook wants you in the kitchen," but before she had finished she was brushed aside, and Sir John strode into the room.

Mother arose. She was holding Marget's hand tight in hers. Sir John did not return her greeting.

"I've just got back," he said, harshly. "My wife has told me. What have you done about these children of yours?"

"Done, Sir John? What *can* I do? If you knew how I feel—"

He waved that aside. "Have they been punished?"

Mother was frightened. You could tell by the funny little smile that wasn't really a smile at all, and her eyes looked as if they had been tied back at the corners with string.

The sight of mother's face made Jerry brave. He stepped up to the big, red-faced man—he looked very small, hardly higher than Sir John's great riding boots.

"I have been punished," he explained, and held out his two little brown palms.

"Good! You deserved more. And this girl—have you whipped her?"

"I've never whipped my baby," mother replied, gently, "but I have talked to her. She is very sorry—"

"Sorry! Talked to her! A thieving brat. Do you know what she's done? There were no other plums like those in England. I planted them, perfected them—it took me a year to bribe the monks to give me a cutting from their tree! I tell you they were the only ones ever grown—that ever will be grown—in England! I was showing them—" he was shouting now, and mother had grown very pale.

"Sir John, I can't tell you how distressed I am. If we could only make it up to you." Then, like a pink-frilled rocket, Marget sprang forward.

"I'm *not* sorry!" she screamed. "You wanted to show those plums—and let them spoil—and no one would have tasted them, no one would have known! You wanted prizes—it's all you cared about. I'm glad I ate them. Glad! Glad! Glad! So *there*, Sir John Bathurst!"

What happened then would probably not have happened if it hadn't been for Jerry.

"You little vixen!" Sir John cried, and raised his riding crop. Jerry leaped at him.

"You dare to touch my sister!" he shouted. Sir John brought down the crop. Just what he meant to do, he himself never clearly realized—certainly not what actu-

ally he did, for the crop fell, not on Jerry's sturdy shoulders, but crash upon Marget's red mouth. Then, without a glance at any of them, he turned and rushed out of the room.

VI

How hot it was! The moonlight, streaming in at the casement window, seemed warm as the noonday sun. The shadow pattern of the vines on the floor never moved.

Mother, in the little bed that had been made at the foot of Marget's bed, was fast asleep. Poor mother. She must not waken her.

How hot it was—impossible to sleep—impossible to lie another minute in that burning bed, with her lips stinging as if a thousand bees had clustered angrily upon them. Besides, *she must go and look at the plum tree!*

The plum tree was calling to her. Feverish, half dreaming, she slipped out of bed and pattered away.

No one saw her stealing through the dim garden between the rows of stocks. How sweet they smelled in the moonlight. The gate was not quite closed; she pushed it open, crept inside, and crouched in the shadow of the wall. All around her were the fruit trees, motionless, their leaves in a pattern of shadows on the grass, interspersed with the fat round shadows of the fruits.

But the little tree in the center had no round shadows under it. Marget watched it. Poor little tree! A puff of wind stole down the garden; the tree shivered, and its narrow leaves turned up their silvery undersides to the moon. They sighed.

A heavier shadow crossed the grass. Some one else was there. Sir John! Marget crouched lower, her heart beating madly. He came up to the tree and touched its leaves, tenderly, as if it had been his child. Then he stooped and picked up the stones from the ground, turning them over and over in his big hand.

Marget's heart contracted. So *that* was how he felt about it—the great, strong man. For the first time she was sorry for what she had done; acutely, intolerably sorry.

Without a moment's reflection, she jumped up and ran, a tiny nightgowned figure, to his side. She clasped his legs—she couldn't reach any higher—her blue

eyes upturned to the startled face above her.

"I'm sorry," she tried to say, but the poor little swollen mouth could not form the words. She smiled, then, a pitiful, twisted smile—and the smile went straight to the strange, baffled, undisciplined heart of the unhappy man. With a smothered cry he caught her up, held her close, and carried her into his house.

"Jinny!" he shouted.

Lady Bathurst, in a long blue dressing gown, her hair about her shoulders, came hurriedly into the dim old hall. Her face was scarred with weeping, and there were deep blue shadows under her eyes, but she looked very young and curiously pretty with that soft, floating hair.

"Yes, John?" Then she saw the child in his arms. "John, what—"

She came closer. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" she screamed. "You did that! It is your mark, you beast, you bully!" The terror of three years had slipped from her as a garment, and she stood before him unafraid, her brown eyes ablaze.

Sir John set Marget gently on her feet. He stared at his wife.

"Jinny," he began.

She cut him short. "Don't speak to me—don't touch me! This is the end, John! I know you now, brute and bully. You've bullied me for three years—no other woman would have stood it—but this—this—you strike that girl—that baby—"

"Jinny—for God's sake! You don't suppose I meant to hit her? The boy flew at me—we were all mixed up. I tell you I don't know how it happened."

"I believe you, John! You don't know anything, *anything*, but your blind beast's temper. But I've finished with you. I've waited, and waited, and endured, because I thought that some day, some time, you would come to your senses. I thought I knew you. But this is the end. I will not sleep another night in your house. I'm going."

"Going?" he echoed, stupidly.

"Now. As I am. Mrs. Sinclair will take me in for pity. For pity, John; pity for your wife, and her own child." Her voice arose to a note of hysteria. "Your two victims, Sir John Bathurst!"

"Jinny, be quiet. Listen to me." He caught her by her shoulders, and held her facing him. "You say you've waited and waited. Why?"

"Because I was a fool!" she cried.

"That's not the reason." His eyes held hers. "Tell me the reason."

"You know the reason," she muttered.

"Perhaps. But say it, Jinny."

"Because I loved you."

"Ah!" His voice was a cry of triumph. They had both forgotten the child who stood, silent and bewildered, behind them.

"Now I've something to say to you, Jinny."

"It's too late to say anything to me, John."

"Listen." He still held her, his eyes—the brilliant, mocking eyes that had thrilled her girl's heart, searching hers.

"That night, the night little Ralph was ill—"

"Ah, no!" she shrieked. "Not that again! I cannot bear it."

"Hush! That night you went to the dance—with young Hendricks. I thought—I'd heard—they said at the club—"

"Young Hendricks!"

"Yes. It wasn't true—I've known for a year it wasn't true. But I was mad, Jinny. The baby—God knows that was bad, and I had some right to be angry—but I made him my excuse. It was *you*, Jinny, I thought that I had lost. I went off my head, I think. It's sheer hell, being jealous," he ended simply.

"Jealous! Of me! Then you did love me? More than little Ralph?"

"More than ten thousand babies!" the man returned, roughly.

"But you never spoke, you never asked me—"

"I couldn't. And then, when I knew—"

"You'd built all this up between us and your pride. Your cruel, inhuman pride wouldn't let you come and tell me. You cared more for *that* than for me, at any rate. Well, perhaps it will console you now. For it's all that will be left to you, John."

"You won't forgive me?" He was looking at her incredulously, almost in amusement. He was so sure of her. But she shook her head.

"I can't," she said, sadly. "You've killed me, John. There's something dead in here." Her thin white hands were pressed against her heart. "It's been—too long."

VII

SHE *meant* it. White and cowed, submissive, with her tortured eyes; for three long

years his to wound as he would—she was defying him at last. He had lost her.

Suddenly, his face crumpled like a baby's that is going to cry; suddenly he was down on his knees, crying dreadfully, his face hidden in the folds of his wife's gown. Marget stood rooted with horror. This was terrible!

"John!" Lady Bathurst was kneeling on the floor, too, now, she was cradling his head in her arms, her tears on his rumpled hair.

"Jinny," the man sobbed, and then, like a child—and what had he ever been but a spoiled and willful child—"Jinny, I've been very unhappy."

"But why," she whispered, "to-night—"

"It was that baby. She came into the garden—I think to find me. I saw her mouth. Somehow I seemed to see myself, then, like the clearing away of a horrible cloud. I saw the thing I was becoming. I—I can't do without you, Jinny. You won't go away?"

She murmured her answer against his wet cheek.

Marget whimpered. Mother and Vera knew that whimper; it never failed of instant response from them. But the two kneeling on the floor were lost to everything but their reawakened love.

Marget felt cold. Her small feet were like ice. She thought of mother; suppose mother had wakened to find her gone.

And V. V.! V. V. had a way of wakening when any one in the house was ill, and slipping into their room to see that all was well. If V. V. found out! She had forgiven Marget, had held her and wept over her after that cruel blow, while mother and Alice sponged her lips. And now Marget had been naughty again—had run away—oh, she was *always* naughty! She turned in panic.

"Holy Mary!" Marget prayed, speeding through the garden. "Please don't let them wake up."

The long shadows were chasing her, the pale sweet stocks looked ghostly as she fled between their ranks. The house was dark and silent. Softly she latched the tall French doors, and crept up the cold wide staircase. From Vera's room she heard the sound of gentle rhythmic breathing.

She reached her own door. The moonlight showed her white bed with its big frilly pillow. She stole in. Mother was quietly sleeping.

The Mighty Arm

A BLIND HERCULES PRAYS FOR COURAGE TO FACE HIS MID-NIGHT WORLD—AND WINS A VAST REWARD

By William Merriam Rouse

THE strength of John Gregory was at rest, like the sunlit Adirondack peaks. The muscles, with which he could lift and crush beyond the belief of any man who had not seen them in action, were relaxed in an iron-braced wooden chair.

As quiet and as strong as the granite buttressed heights he sat, tipped back against the wall of the roadside shack where he sold those odds and ends of food and drink which automobilists buy.

He knew that the apple tree down the road was in blossom, because he could smell it, but he could see neither that nor the sky-touching mountains which he loved. For nearly two years he had been blind.

Of bitterness and despair, Blind John, as they had begun to call him, knew the depths. He, to whom the thewed and sinewed wrestling champions of the mountains had bowed, was chained to little familiar ways about his shack, and the path to his house.

Unless he could get hold of a man, his strength was as helpless as that of a child—John Gregory, who had never had his knuckles laid on the table, or his shoulders put to the ground! He could twist the wrist of any man who lived, within the farthest echoes of his fame. All those who believed they were good at this stunt had come—and met defeat.

John knew how green the grass would be now; how fresh and vivid it was up to the very edge of the State highway. He could turn his head to the right, and know that his face was pointed at his house.

There May, his wife, ran a little restaurant to help out. She had stuck by him; he could say that much for her, anyhow.

If, in the fullness of his power, he had ever contemplated this fate that overtook

him, he would have said that everybody would desert him. Yet, it had not turned out that way. The day before it had happened he had petulantly shaken May and set her down in a chair with no gentle hand; but when they brought him in, groping and cursing, she had stood by. She had taken hold of things.

It was not as if they had been crazy about each other, like a couple of kids. He was thirty-five, now, and she was close to thirty; but a good-looking woman the last time he had seen her. She had brown hair, and eyes that changed from blue to gray, and sometimes seemed to grow black. No, he could not complain about the way she had taken hold.

II

WORSE than the everlasting night in which he lived, was the remembrance of how it had come about. If Tug Bigelow had struck the blow as they stood and slugged each other there in the mill yard, it would not have been so hard to bear—a fair fight, and no whining. He had been thrashing Tug, just as he had beaten every other man who had fought him.

It was the runty Smithy Kay who had come up behind and hit him with the edge of a board—Smithy Kay, whom any full-sized man would scorn to strike. John Gregory had cuffed him once, for kicking a dog, and this had been the little man's revenge. Kay had intended to turn the fight to Bigelow—and this was what he had done by that blow on the back of the head.

Blind John had promised to take Kay apart, limb by limb, and slowly, if ever he could lay hands upon him; but every one except Kay knew that he would not do it. No, there was no use in that. There was no use in anything except courage.

John ground his teeth together. He needed courage to live along for maybe thirty more years like this, guided by finger tips and ears and nose; to live in a little black house whose walls could not be pushed very far back at any time. Courage—the quality that had rapped down the knuckles of the best men from Poke o' Moonshine to Mullen Creek.

"John! Oh, John!"

It was May, calling across the few hundred feet that separated house and shack. Since his ears had become so keen he had noticed how shrill the voices of some of the mountain women were; but May's voice did not grate on his raw nerves. He could say that much for her. He took away the pipe that was nearly always between his teeth, and answered:

"Yep! What?"

"Bring two packages of them ginger-snaps when you come to dinner!"

"Yep!"

He spoke from deep in his throat, in a rolling tone that itself savored of strength. Now, as he got up and stretched, the might of his body revealed itself. Against the sleeves of a blue denim shirt the muscles swelled and lumped until the generously cut cloth was filled. His thighs strained the stout khaki of his trousers.

In neck and wrist, ankle and trunk, he was thick; built like one of those old houses whose hand hewn timbers will support ten times the weight they are called upon to bear. The little fat that had begun to come since his blindness was not yet noticeable to the eye.

Gregory could tell the make of every motor car that went past his shack, the owner of every foot that touched the boards of the porch—strangers and strange cars only excepted. Here, on the outskirts of the village, he did not have as much company as he would have liked, but trade was good. Cars stopped, and the neighbors all traded with him, because the stores were a half mile away. He kept some scattered groceries with his tobacco and candy and soft drinks.

III

THE shack had been a life-saver. He had found that he was in the way when he tried to help about the house and restaurant; it only bothered May, and it made him surly. So he had had this place built of two-by-fours and rough lumber; rosin

papered and shingled, so that it would be warm enough for winter.

Here he found something to do. What he could not do for himself, such as keeping the books, a neighbor did for him. That was one of the lighter spots in the darkness; since he had been blind he had found a friend.

Old Jim Varley came in at least once a day, and sometimes oftener, to look after Gregory; an old man of a type that is rare, but to be found scattered like salt over the earth. Varley had made more money than he needed, without particularly caring whether he did or not. People seldom got to know him unless they were in trouble of some kind.

He wore, invariably, a ragged brown sweater, because he liked brown sweaters; and when complete disintegration forced him to buy a new one, he was troubled for a few days until he got used to the innovation. He rendered service to Gregory without any thought of pay. Jim Varley could have bought Gregory out a hundred times over.

This day Varley was late in coming, and Blind John felt, unconsciously, the lack of his mostly silent companionship. One of his times of rebellion came upon him.

Where he stood, in front of his chair, he knew that there was a porch post before him. He reached out and clasped it with his hands, and exerted a fraction of his strength. It creaked. He could hear the nails pull in the wood where it was toenailed to the floor at the bottom. The plate, above, moved and groaned. The roof gave forth a crack of protest.

"Hell! I could rip this thing to pieces!" he muttered along his pipestem.

There was a blind man in the Bible, Samson, who had done something like that, and killed a lot of people. Sometimes John felt a raging impulse to kill, and crush, and destroy; there were moments when he felt as though he would like to pull the whole world down and smash everything in it, including himself. Yes, himself most of all—end everything!

Why had he been picked out to have this happen to him? He had been a rough man, but he had never been mean. There were plenty of worse men than he was, and right here in the village, too.

His grip tightened against the post, and he could feel the muscles of his forearms contract. Power flowed all through his

body. Leg muscles, back muscles, set themselves. His eighteen-inch neck bulged.

IV

A SOUND came from the roadside; a wordless little tune in the voice of a child. Gregory knew that it was Betty Kay, and judged she was about fifty feet from the shack. Her mother dared to send her there on errands when Smithy was away, which was most of the time.

Blind John relaxed. He leaned easily against the post, and another feeling, which he knew equally well with the rage of despair, took possession of him.

It was courage, and a touch of hopeful peace. It was like a faint light, far off in the night; so dim and so far that he could not be quite sure that it was there at all; but it helped. It was something in his mind. A kind of promise, it was, that he would be able to grope through the suffering to happiness, if only he would have courage.

"They's something, somewhere," he growled, thickly. "I know damn well they's *something, somewhere!*"

"Hello, John!" The voice of little Betty was music to him; her hand touched his like the falling petal of an apple blossom. He thought of that, as her fingers curled in his broad palm, but no amount of money would have hired him to say it aloud.

"Hello, you little skeezicks! How's my best girl to-day?"

"Al-l-l right!" Betty replied.

"Come to visit with me a little while? Mebbe you better have a piece of candy!"

"No-o-o. I got to go right home."

"Your mother want something?"

"Y-yes." There was the trace of a repressed sob in the word. "Yes, mamma wants a can of beans for dinner, but—but—she ain't got any money!"

"Ho!" Blind John roared. "What you s'pose we care about money? You and me are friends, ain't we? Well, I tell you what we'll do. Every time you get hungry, and don't have any money, you come and get something like a can of beans, say, and I'll charge it to Betty Kay. Then, bimeby, when you grow up to be a big girl, you can pay me. Is that all right?"

"I guess so," Betty said, a little doubtfully, but with growing cheerfulness. "When I get to be fifteen or sixteen I can go to work. Anyways, I can run errands for you now."

"Sure!" John agreed, heartily. "Come on! Let's go get them beans."

He went indoors, growling under his breath a lurid and blasphemous opinion of Smithy Kay. He knew the feeling of every foot of his progress, and Betty, young as she was, knew that he did not like to have help except in strange places.

John got behind the counter, touching the wall here and there. He ran his hand along the shelves. The position of each variety of every article was in his mind. His finger tips brushed the boxes of cigarettes, the ginger ale bottles, the assortment of cookies.

Mrs. Kay would want a big can of beans. He located them by position, and made sure by the glossy texture of the paper wrapper.

"Them's beans, I guess." He set the can on the counter.

"Thank you, John."

He heard the can scrape, and knew that Betty was dragging it over the edge. Then the patter of her little feet sounded across the floor and the porch.

"Good-by, John!"

"Good-by, Betty!"

V

JOHN GREGORY felt his way out of doors again, into the sunshine that struck across his chair. He recognized the sun also by feeling. A strange step came to his ears, and afterward the sound of the somewhat slow feet of Jim Varley.

John straightened up beside his chair. He was getting so he stooped a little from that constant, accursed necessity for touching things, and he wanted to look something like his old self before strangers.

"Hello, Jim!" he said.

"Lo!" the quiet voice of Varley rejoined. "John, here's an old friend come to see you—Art Baker. You know him."

"Art Baker? Well, I'll be darned!" John grinned and put out a hand, and waited. Baker's hand found his. Instantly he had an experience that came often. He could tell that Baker was embarrassed by the feeling of his hand.

"Well, John, I'm mighty glad to—"

"Say it!" Gregory barked. "Glad to see me! Folks is like that. They think about my being blind, and it makes 'em all fussed up. Might as well come right out with things. Yep, I been blind 'most two years. Got a dirty deal, and that's all they

is to that. Set down, Art. I ain't seen you in years. What you doing around here, now?"

"Why, I'm farming back up near Poke o' Moonshine," Baker replied, with an easier note in his voice. "I come down to-day to see about selling a young bull. Guess I'll drive him down to-morrow."

"It ain't a job I'd want to tackle," Gregory remarked, "not fixed the way I be now. They was a time I'd undertake to handle a bull alone."

"This one's gentle as a kitten. A kid could fetch him with a piece of sheep twine."

"Yep." Gregory fiddled with his pipe. After all, it was none of his business. "They's a lot of good men killed by young bulls that was as gentle as kittens. I see one man get gored and trampled."

"Shucks!" Baker laughed. "I can handle this feller. Do any twisting, now, John?"

Here old Varley chuckled, and spoke for the first time since his greeting. He was like that, always willing to let the other fellow do the talking.

"I guess Art's figgering he's got good enough so he can twist you, John! He was asking me!"

John laughed good-naturedly. Here was something he enjoyed. He put out a hand.

"Lemme feel your arm, Art!"

Baker placed Gregory's fingers upon his own biceps, and contracted them. It was the arm of a strong man, in good condition; hard as oak, and a big arm. Yes, Baker had filled out.

"There's been some good men come along here that tried to twist John!" Varley chuckled again.

"Oh, well! I don't know as I can. Might try, if John wants to. I turned most of the boys up around my country."

"Come on in." Gregory arose with a swiftness forgetful of his lack of sight. "Get out the table, Jim. I got a solid table I keep for twisting."

VI

If he could not have told by the sounds, Gregory would have known anyhow exactly what was being done. The table was in the clear space in front of the counter, with two stout chairs, one on each side of it. He sat down in one of them, and heard Baker sit in the other. Varley saw to it that neither had an advantage.

Their elbows were placed upon the table, with forearms raised and hands clasped. Varley felt of their wrists to make sure that neither was trying to force the other out of line; he cautioned them to keep their weight on the chairs, and to twist with the arm and shoulder only. A last touch, and he stepped back.

"Go!"

Instantly, Baker tried the trick of bending Gregory's wrist by a quick jerk so that the straight line from knuckles to elbow would be broken. This was fair enough, after the word had been given, but he could not do it.

John grunted—a laugh. He preferred to hold steady for a moment, and feel out the other man's strength. He held his own arm upright against the best that Art Baker could do. Then, slowly and steadily, he began to force Baker's hand and forearm toward the table.

Two-thirds of the way down the challenger's strength gave out. Blind John rapped Baker's knuckles smartly against the wood. The table ceased to groan, and Baker began to pant.

"I never saw a man as strong as you be, John!"

"Me, neither!" John chuckled. "A feller don't need his eyesight to twist wrists."

"Can't they do anything for your eyes, John?" Baker asked, when his breath had returned to normal.

"Nope," Gregory replied, and waited a long moment. "That is—the doc says they can't do anything. But I dunno. Sometimes I *feel* as though it might come back. But, shucks, I don't dast to think about it. I'm getting along all right. Jim, here, is better 'n two pair of eyes!"

"Varley kind of looking after you?"

"Yep. But it ain't so much that I need looking after. I can find everything, and make change. Jim, when he takes out his watch, he says what time it is out loud. If they's a team or a car going by that I don't know by the sound, he says who it is without my asking. I hate to ask questions. It makes a feller feel good to have somebody like that around. It's them little things, Art, that a feller appreciates. And Jim says I'm blind, right out. Just like that. I don't want nobody calling it my affliction!"

This was rather a long and heartfelt speech for Blind John to make; but Baker had been a friend of his youthful revels,

and Jim Varley was the friend of his time of suffering. The other men shuffled their feet, and he knew they were both embarrassed. He cursed himself inwardly for having said so much.

"It makes it good for you, John," Baker said.

"I don't do so much," Varley remarked, quietly. "Just come around so John won't get lonesome. That's all."

Gregory heard a movement. With the next sound he knew what it was. Jim Varley had got out the red bandanna handkerchief that he always carried and was blowing his nose. What did he want to take it that way for? Jim need not feel sorry for him. That anybody should feel sorry for him was hard to bear.

"Well," Baker remarked, "I got to go, if I want to get home in time to start back to-morrow with that bull. Guess I'll have time to drop in here for a minute. So long, John."

"Good luck, Art."

VII

HE left them, and Varley and Gregory went out in silence to the porch. They sat in silence while cars passed at intervals, and at longer intervals people stopped to make small purchases.

Blind John remained in his chair. He was doing a lot of thinking to-day; more than usual. So he let Jim wait on the customers. Lately, a kind of yeast had been working in Gregory's mind; his contrasting moods had been more frequent and more sharply defined.

The afternoon wore on, while the two men sat and smoked in comfortable companionship, and spoke not. By the cool breath from the mountains against his face, Gregory knew that it was sunset. Well, what did it matter if this afternoon had gone like so many others? He had had a chance to think about a lot of things.

From the direction of the house came the sound of a door, violently opened. The voice of May lifted and carried to them. This time her words would have reached the shack if it had been twice as far away.

"John! If you're coming to supper, bring them gingersnaps! If you ain't, you can stay there all night for all I care!"

"Jiminy Christmas!" Gregory exploded. "I forgot to go home to dinner!"

"Then you better go to supper, now," Varley said. "I'll close up."

Blind John went into the shack and found two packages of the gingersnaps. Then, with his feet following carefully the planks which had been laid down to guide him between store and house, he walked home. By the feeling in the dining room he thought there were no guests that night, and when May spoke he knew that he was right. She used the tone reserved for family quarrels.

"Well! I had five people here for dinner, and you, over there, with nothing to do but smoke and gossip! You might of brought them gingersnaps if you didn't want any dinner yourself!"

"I forgot, May," John admitted. He sat down in his chair at the table. "I'll try to keep my mind on things better."

He heard her sniff suspiciously. This was a strangely humble tone for him to use, and he knew it. He could tell that she was puzzled.

"You gone on another bat?" she demanded querulously.

"Nope." He waited, fingering his knife and fork. Finally he turned his face in her direction. "I been doing a lot of thinking, May. A blind man thinks a lot. They's something—somewhere—that's better than what folks have."

"Sure!" May exclaimed, bitterly. "All you got to do is to walk down to the village and see better than we've got!"

"I don't mean that. I mean—inside of us. Maybe we've missed—feeling—something. When you and me was kids we went crazy about each other. You remember?"

"Remember—" Her voice broke suddenly, and when she found it again it was as hard and as brittle as ice. "You're drunk or crazy, John. Eat your supper and shut up!"

VIII

THAT night a dark fog swept over the spirit of John Gregory. Through the long hours he lay and listened to the sounds that come from a house in the night; the occasional creak of timbers, the muffled gnawing of a mouse. Beside him, May breathed evenly; wife and stranger.

Jim Varley was closer to him than his wife; there was something wrong in that. Now that he realized this, it came to him that perhaps it had been his own fault; at least as much his fault as hers.

He drew his arm up and felt of the rising biceps, of the enormous shoulder mus-

cles. The forearm was a marvel of corded strength. He had been more in love with his own power than with his wife.

What had he ever done for May that had caused him any trouble? He had bought her good clothes, just as he had bought drinks for the boys. That was all. Had he ever helped anybody as Jim Varley was helping him now?

Out of the past came a picture, until now half forgotten. John saw himself winning a fat men's race, and a good purse. He had been able to qualify because he had weighed more than two hundred pounds, but the race had been intended for men who were fat.

It was a sporting event, and he had not been a good sport. He had spoiled the fun for a handful of money, and the fat men had been good enough sports to stand by the terms of entry.

That night Blind John knew the denial of self. The peace that he had hitherto known in little snatches came to dwell with him. Courage! Now he knew beyond doubt that he would be brave enough to live; and there had been times when he had doubted it. Now he knew.

He would be able to do something for May, and other folks, besides. It was a feeling which he could only express in a whisper that went vaguely into the stillness of the bedroom.

"By crimony, now I *know* they's *something, somewhere!*"

Blind John went to sleep, and when he awoke his wife had gone. It must be time to get up. As he found his clothes, he could feel the warmth of the sun streaming in at the window. Another nice day to sit on the porch, and smoke, and talk now and then with somebody; to discuss men, and dogs, and other important things, with Jim Varley. The experience of the night was with him still. He was at peace.

May spoke little at breakfast. She had a right to feel that way, John told himself, and the time to say anything more to her was not yet. Maybe it never would come: those things had to work themselves out if they got worked out at all. Let her alone, and do what he could for her—served him right.

IX

THE day began as Gregory had expected; sitting on the porch with his chair tipped back, and Jim ambling up about the

time of the third pipe. They took up the thread of daily intercourse as usual, with Varley announcing those events of which Gregory could not become aware without help.

"There goes a big closed car. Full of city folks, I guess."

"Huh! They'll be coming along now, lots of 'em!"

So on, at intervals, until Gregory heard Jim move suddenly in his chair, and draw a quick breath. He waited. He could depend upon Jim to tell him what was going on; but this time a muttering of rare curses came from the old man's throat before he spoke.

"Dern Art Baker for a fool! Here he comes with that bull, and nothing but a rope around his neck! No ring in his nose! And the critter's acting up!"

"I told him!" Gregory said, sucking a little faster at his pipe. "S'pose he knows enough to leg it for a tree?"

"And Smithy Kay and little Betty just turned into the road from their house! Oh—Goddlemighty!"

"What? What?" John demanded. He snapped up from his chair and stood poised, his mind for the moment chaos.

"The critter's turned bad! It was a red car going by that done it! Lord! He's knocked Art into the ditch. Knocked him out, I guess."

"Where's Betty?" Gregory cried. "Ain't Kay got sense enough to grab her and run?"

"He's run himself! She's standing there, John! She don't seem to know the critter's dangerous!"

Gregory had taken two or three steps. His mighty hands gripped Jim Varley by the shoulders.

"Point me toward him, Jim! Quick!"

"John! You've forgot you can't see!"

"Point me toward him, damn your hide!" The fingers of Blind John closed unintentionally, and Jim Varley cried out in pain. The hands relaxed instantly. "Point me, or I'll start, hit or miss!"

"Right, John! If you want to go out that way, it ain't for me to stop you!"

"Never mind that, Jim. You get Betty if you can."

Gregory felt himself turned and steadied. A low bellow came from directly in front of him, about twenty feet away. He knew it for the ugly sound that comes before a charge. More to be dreaded than bear or

panther was that beast in the road; eager to gore and trample in the joy of destruction.

In that moment Blind John felt a kind of happiness. Here was release, and he had not sought it. Courage to the last—and with his boots on!

He started forward in a slow shuffle; he must not fall. It was his job to keep the bull busy until Jim could get Betty out of the way. That was all. He heard the pawing, the blasts of raging breath in front of him, and was guided by them. Nearer and nearer he approached.

John Gregory kept himself balanced as he went forward. He thought he could tell by sound when the charge came. Then he would step to one side, and try to get hold of the animal—to hang on as long as he could.

X

SUDDENLY he realized that he was almost upon the bull—and the animal had not charged. Swiftly the solution flashed to him. He was so close that the bull had dropped its head to toss him.

Instantly he flung himself forward, limp of body, so that whatever shock came would have the least possible effect. His hands reached out, and his thought was something in the nature of a prayer.

"I hope to God they ain't took his horns off!"

No! The hands of Blind John found the horns, and closed upon them. His intuition had been right. The great head was lowered, and it made the upward, side-wise thrust at him just as his hands set themselves firmly upon the horns.

He was lifted clear of the ground, into the air. He hung there, keeping his grip, and letting his weight go limp upon the bull as if he had clinched with a boxer. The head was borne down slowly.

This was an animal not full grown, but possessed already of a power that awed Blind John. Never in another man had he found anything like the strength that met his own now. Men had been easy to handle. He tried to get a foothold on the ground.

The bull lifted him again. It wrenched and shook its head. Slowly it began to go forward, in little, jerky charges. The feet of the blind man were clear of the earth most of the time. He wondered how many seconds had passed. Was Betty safe? Anyhow, it would be madness to let go.

John felt a blow that ran from the back of his head down the length of his body. Yellow lights snapped and streamed across his dark world. He knew that one of the porch posts had been carried away by their impact. The bull was taking him into the shack.

Somehow they sideswiped the shelves. A rain of cans beat upon them. The bull stopped, confused by this strangeness.

Blind John began to get angry. He felt a swelling rage that promised to equal that of the bull. Painfully hurt by the porch post, and pounded by heavy cans, he forgot everything except that the bull was destroying his beloved shack.

Gregory had on rubber soled shoes, and when the bull gave him a chance to get his feet firmly against the boards of the floor he was able to set himself. He became furious. For the first time he thought of fighting the bull. If that bull wanted a grudge fight, he could have it!

"I'll show ye!" John gritted, and with a lightninglike movement he shifted his grip upon the horns. The right hand bore down with his weight behind it, and the left hand lifted, with the shoulder under it. There was a line of force from that shoulder to the heel set against the floor. The head of the bull turned slightly. He coughed.

Gregory found his back pressed against a wall. So much the better. He called upon reserves of strength which he had not known himself to possess. Down and up, turning, slowly and steadily, went the creature's head. Blind John felt the button on the neckband of his shirt pop and fall. A job for May.

Steady! Once he almost weakened. His teeth locked. It was the first time in his life that he had been called upon to use his full strength. He needed more than his full strength. Where that surplus came from he did not know, but it came.

At a certain instant he knew that he was going to win. Then he felt something soft loll against his knee. The bull's tongue was out. Then the animal began to sink down.

Blind John threw every atom of his new-found power into a final heave. He heard a crack like a pistol shot, but muffled. Then he fell, and consciousness ended.

XI

WHEN John Gregory came out of that mysterious region where he had been, his

first thought was that he was stretched out flat on his back. That was no way for a man to be.

He was in bed! Then it must be morning, and time to get up. Something was wrong.

All at once he remembered. He stirred. Apparently nothing was broken. But there was a peculiar feeling. And there were bandages all around his head. At least it felt that way, but he was too tired to lift a hand to find out. Let things ride as they were.

"John?" His name came softly. It was May. She sat down on the edge of the bed. He worked his jaw, and swallowed.

"Betty?" Funny that his voice should be so faint. "Is she all right?"

"Yes, John." May's voice was more gentle than it had been for years—or so it seemed. Maybe he was not hearing very well.

"How's the bull?" He tried to chuckle, but the sound was a croak.

"You broke his neck!" Was it pride that made her words ring? Well, he was a mite proud of himself!

"Licked a bull, May!"

He felt a drop of water fall upon his hand. What was she crying for?

"Oh, John! I know what you meant last night—about missing—something!"

But it had been so long—so long—I guess I was mean!"

A sudden glory filled him. Why, this was more than life, more than sight! The bond that had once been between them leaped into being again.

"May!"

Their hands met. He crushed her work hardened fingers—work hardened for him! They understood each other now. A kiss touched his lips. It was a kiss like those they had known in the starry nights of their first love.

He felt her draw back as steps came into the room. That would be old Jim Varley, and a stranger.

"You get Betty, Jim?"

"Yep!"

"Here's the doctor, John," May said, nervously.

"I'll look at the bandages," a strange voice announced.

Capable fingers pulled gently at the padding that lay across the upper part of John's face. Suddenly a pain like a sword pierced through his head, and drew half a groan before he could set his jaws.

"Uh!" the doctor remarked. "Sensitive to light. The paralysis is gone. Probably it was the porch post that did it. I've no doubt you'll be able to see again, Gregory."

MY TWO HOUSES

I HAVE a little house of gray
With little people in it,
Who work and hurry all the day,
And never stop a minute.

I have a marble mansion, too—
A palace of repose;
The floors have rugs of pekin blue,
The walls are hung with rose.

My little people think I'm queer
Whenever I say "palace";
"You just imagine it, my dear,"
They tell me, without malice.

Would I be happy if I were
Alone in a rose-hung room?
Or shall I stay amid the stir
Of crockery and broom?

Mella Russell McCallum

Bonnie Wee Thing

MIMI DEXTER AND DESBOROUGH HUGHES WERE WORLDS
APART IN THEIR APPRAISAL OF LIFE—WITH THE
ODDS AGAINST COMPROMISE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

HUGHES did not desire or intend to fall in love, ever, with anybody. And when he realized that he was doing so, and that the girl was Mimi, he rebelled vigorously against this injustice on the part of fate.

She was such an absolutely unsuitable person. She was so much too young, and too pretty, and too lively. Even her name was almost an insult to his intelligence. Mimi! That he should be devoted to a Mimi! He would have struggled gallantly against this outrage, if he had had a chance. But he did not see it coming. It fell upon him like a bolt from the blue, like a sand-bag upon the head in an apparently peaceful street.

He met this Mimi on the ship coming over from England, where she had been amusing herself, and he had been attending to some business for his company. He never saw her dancing, or flirting, or promenading the deck, as so many other girls did; on the contrary, he saw her always in a deck chair at her mother's side, reading books, or looking out over the sea, with a grave and thoughtful expression. So he had thought that she was different from other girls—and did not know that that thought is almost always fatal to a young man's peace of mind.

Nor had he suspected that her grave and quiet air came, not from a meditative spirit, but was due entirely to the malaise she always felt on shipboard. And by the time she had overcome this, had her sea legs, and was her true self again, it was too late. Five days only were needed to deprive him of all freedom. That fifth evening the blow fell.

There was no moonlight, no music, none of those things which might have put him

on his guard. It was four o'clock in the afternoon—one of the most unromantic hours in the day—and he met her outside the purser's office—surely not a romantic spot. What is more, he had been changing money and thinking about money. Then she came. She said she wanted to send a wireless message to her Uncle Tommy in London.

"I do love Uncle Tommy so!" she said.

In justice, Hughes was obliged to admit that she did not realize what she was doing. She was thinking solely of her Uncle Tommy at the moment; that misty look in her eyes was all for him. But when he saw that look, and when he heard her speak, Hughes was done for. He knew it.

A strange sort of confusion came over him, so that he saw her in a haze, her little, pointed face, her shining hair, her dark eyes, the striped scarf about her shoulders, all swimming before him in a sort of rainbow. He thought: "Good Lord! What a tender, sweet, lovely little thing! What a darling little thing! I can't help it! I love her!"

It was a mercy that this confusion robbed him, temporarily, of all power to speak, otherwise he would have said this aloud. But all he could do was to stand there, staring at her; and her own preoccupation with Uncle Tommy prevented her from noticing the look on his face.

"You see," she went on, "he said I'd probably never see him again. Of course he always does say that. Every year mother says we'll probably never be able to go to England again, and every year they say good-by to each other like that. 'Good-by, Thomas, my dear brother!' 'Good-by, Mary! It is not likely that we shall meet again in this world.' I know they enjoy it,

but it does make me feel miserable for the first month. And just suppose we couldn't ever afford to go over again!"

"Afford?" thought Hughes. "Is she poor? Good Heaven! Is she poor—worried—not able to get what she ought to have?"

He studied both Mimi and her mother very critically after that. They didn't look poor; indeed, they seemed to him better dressed than any other ladies in the world. But what did he know of such matters? All those charming costumes might be pathetically cheap, for all he could tell. Perhaps they made everything themselves.

And, when you looked at them carefully, you saw that both mother and child were very slender and little. They certainly were not the sort of persons who could be poor with impunity.

They asked him to call, and he did so without delay, the very day after they landed. And his fears were confirmed. They were poor. They had a flat over on the West Side, in the Chelsea district—the most pathetic flat!

In the sitting room there were two of the strangest bookcases, which Mrs. Dexter said she had herself made, out of packing cases. Enamelled white, they were, with blue butterflies painted upon them by Mimi. And there was a couch, covered in gay cretonne, which, directly he had sat upon it, Hughes felt sure had also been made by Mrs. Dexter, perhaps out of barrel staves.

And everything was so dainty, and so neat, and so fragile. He could scarcely open his mouth all the evening, for the distress and compassion that filled him.

Now, Hughes did not know it, but he was really a young man. He had lived for twenty-six years, and he believed that those years had aged him and completely disillusioned him. But Mrs. Dexter knew better. She knew how young he was. She was sorry for him. She said so, to her daughter. She said:

"Poor Mr. Hughes! He's such a nice boy!"

She had seen other nice boys come into that pathetic flat, and she knew what happened to them. She knew, better than any one else, what a dangerous creature her child was. She expected Mimi to smile at her words as if they were, somehow, a compliment, but, to her surprise, the girl turned away, and pretended to look out of the window.

"He—he is awfully nice, isn't he?" Mimi remarked.

Mrs. Dexter could scarcely believe her senses. She looked and looked at her child, saw that dangerous head bent, heard that note of uncertainty in her voice. Mrs. Dexter no longer felt sorry for Mr. Hughes; on the contrary, she was suddenly inspired with an amazing insight into his character. She saw grave faults in him.

It might have been wiser if she had kept these revelations to herself, but where her child was concerned she was perhaps a little prejudiced. She had been a widow for many years, and had had nobody but this child to think about; and although she had long ago made up her mind that she must lose her some day, although she really wanted Mimi to marry some day, she did wish to have a voice in electing the husband when the time came.

She wished to make no unreasonable demands; this husband need not be extraordinarily handsome, or particularly famous; no, all she required was a man of ancient lineage, considerable wealth, lofty character, great intelligence, courtly manners, and a humble if not abject devotion to Mimi.

Mr. Hughes did not possess these qualifications. He was nothing more than the branch office manager of a large typewriter company. His income was pretty good, and the president of the company thought him a very intelligent young man, but it was not the sort of intelligence Mrs. Dexter valued. It was too businesslike.

He did not scintillate. As for his character, that seemed to be good enough, in a matter-of-fact way, and his manners were civil enough. But it was in humility and abjectness that he was so deficient. She had noticed that at once.

"Of course, he's a very *ordinary* sort of young man," she observed.

"I don't think so!" said Mimi. "I think—"

She couldn't explain exactly what it was she thought. Only that the very first time she had set eyes on Mr. Hughes, she had realized that there was something about him. Even before she had spoken a word to him, she had watched him promenading the deck, had observed his long, vigorous stride, his keen and somewhat severe profile, and she had *liked* him. Impossible to explain just why; perhaps it was that very lack of abjectness that most entertained her.

Other young men had been so terribly eager and anxious to please; and Mr. Hughes was the only one who had ever sat beside her and not even smiled when she smiled. Anyhow, whatever the cause, she liked him, and when Mrs. Dexter called him "ordinary," it hurt her.

Never before had Mrs. Dexter seen her daughter look hurt about any young man, and it frightened her. When she was alone in her room that night, she cried, and when that necessary prelude was done with, she began to think, and presently she made up her mind.

It was obvious to her that Mr. Hughes did not appreciate Mimi. Probably he was not capable of so doing, but, in the circumstances, it was her duty to do what she could. So she very cordially invited him to call on a Saturday afternoon; and just before he was due to arrive, she told Mimi that she had forgotten to buy tea, and sent her out to buy half a pound of a sort which could only be bought at a shop some distance away.

When Hughes arrived, he found Mrs. Dexter alone. He was not at all alarmed by this, or by her extra-friendly manner; indeed, he was rather touched by her welcome. They sat down, and she began to talk, and he was not surprised that she should talk about Mimi. Such was his condition that he couldn't imagine how anybody could wish to talk of anything else.

She told him anecdotes of Mimi's childhood and school days, all designed to show him what a gifted, brilliant, remarkable child she had been. Hughes listened with serious attention; he was impressed; he thought to himself, what a wonderful girl Mimi was. What a wonderful girl!

And then Mrs. Dexter ruined everything. If she had but stopped there, content to demonstrate her child's rare qualities by her own evidence, all would have been well. But, instead, she tried to strengthen her case by bringing in Professor MacAndrews as a witness.

She began with a fervent eulogy of Professor MacAndrews, his vast learning, his wonderful achievements, his noble character. And Hughes, although still politely attentive, grew secretly restive, and wished to hear no more of this paragon. Then she fetched a photograph of the professor, and the young man was in no mood to admire.

A small man, the professor had been, physically, that is; with a pugnacious little

white beard and fierce little eyes, and an upturned nose. Hughes looked at the photograph with what might be called a non-committal expression, and said, "Yes, I see!"

"A wonderful intellect!" Mrs. Dexter declared. "And you can't imagine how devoted he was to Mimi! He always predicted a remarkable future for her. He said she was too young, then, for him to tell just how her talents would develop, but he knew she would be *something*."

"I see!" said Hughes.

His tone should have warned Mrs. Dexter, but it did not. She was too intent upon making her point.

"It really was beautiful," she went on, "the devotion of that lonely old scholar for little Mimi! Every one spoke of it. He used to come to the house, you know, and as soon as he got inside the door, he'd say, 'And where's the bonnie wee thing?' That's what he used to call her. From one of Burns's poems. See, it's written here, in this book he gave her.

"'Bonnie wee thing, cannie wee thing,
Lovely wee thing, was thou mine
I wad wear thee in my bosom
Lest my jewel I should tine.'"

"Of course it sounded quite different with his quaint Scotch accent."

"I see!" said Hughes.

He hoped it had sounded different, because, as Mrs. Dexter read it, he thought he had never heard anything so idiotic. The whole thing annoyed him. He had no objection to Mrs. Dexter's talking about Mimi; in fact, he liked to hear her, and thought it natural and agreeable. But otherwise, apart from Mrs. Dexter, who was Mimi's mother, he had wished to believe himself the sole true appreciator of Mimi.

It was a pity that there was nobody at hand to tell Mrs. Dexter anecdotes about Hughes's childhood. If there had been any one—his sister, for instance—she would have learned what a pig-headed fellow he was; how, if you wanted to convince him, you must never, never argue with him; how he simply could not be driven, but must be humored. Any such person could have told her what a disastrous mistake she made in thus bringing Professor MacAndrews into the situation.

When Mimi came back with the tea, she saw at once that something had gone amiss.

At first she was worried, but presently the young man's silence and his very serious expression became annoying to her. It seemed to her important to show him that she didn't care in the least, and in order so to do, she became more frivolous than he had ever before seen her. For the first time she treated him as she had treated those other nice boys; she laughed at him, and teased him, and dazzled him.

Hughes was no more proof against this than any of the others had been, but, unlike those others, he stubbornly resisted the enchantment. He was ready to admit that she was dazzling, but the gayer she was, the more he thought of Professor MacAndrews. He thought to himself that she must know only too well how pretty she was, and how great was her power.

"It's a pity!" he thought, sternly. "It's very bad for a girl to have a silly old cuckoo like that making such a fuss over her. Calling her a 'bonnie wee thing'! Of course I won't deny that she is, but—"

But no one should have told her so before Hughes had a chance. Certainly he wasn't going to tell her those things all over again, and he wasn't going to accept any bearded professor's opinion of her, either. No; he intended to study her gravely and dispassionately, and judge for himself.

Three times he came to the flat for that purpose, and each time that he came, with his grave and dispassionate expression, the girl was more frivolous than ever. And on the third evening she was outrageous.

She said that evening that she would make him a Welsh rarebit. It appeared to him no more than his duty as a guest, or a gentleman, or something of the sort, to go into the kitchen with her, and there he watched her make a most horrible concoction, the most leathery, nightmare-provoking rarebit. And he saw that she knew nothing about cooking, in its true and serious meaning, and she wore a silly little apron, and she burned her silly little finger.

As he walked home that evening, he told himself, almost violently, that he had *not* kissed Mimi, and had not said a single word to her of any significance. But that gave him precious little comfort. He had wanted to, and he knew that she knew it. He remembered an unsteady little smile of hers.

"I won't be a fool!" cried Hughes to himself. "I know she's—well—a very nice

girl. I'll admit that I—I like her. But she's—well—she's not my sort. She's—Look at the way they live! I couldn't stand that. All those little frilly curtains and covers and doodabs, and those antique plates—with nothing real to eat on 'em. I know it's all very dainty and so on—but it's—it's too damn' fancy!"

He was honestly frightened, now. He didn't see how he could ever escape from that atmosphere of doodabs and fanciness. That moment in the kitchen, that one glance they had exchanged, had shown him, that being in love was a malady which grew worse with time.

He would inevitably ask Mimi to marry him, and if she refused him, life would be intolerable; and if she accepted him, they would have to have a home which would be filled with little lace doilies and antique plates, and his existence would be made dainty—and fancy.

Hughes had been brought up with Spartan simplicity by his very poor and very proud family in New Hampshire, and their ways were the ways he admired. He was not quite so fond of being poor, though, and had cured himself of that, but he still lived in Spartan style.

He had a furnished room, from which he had obliged the landlady to remove all those things she most admired; he ate his meals in a shining white restaurant where there were no tablecloths, and in his office he would permit no trace of luxury. He wouldn't even have a private office; he sat out in plain view of his staff, upon a severely efficient chair, before a desk which was a model of neatness and order. That was how he liked things. And now, here he was, in love with Mimi!

What to do?

He thought of a plan.

II

THERE was one woman in the world whom Hughes admired without reservation, and that was his aunt, Kate Boles. He saw in her no flaw. She was a childless widow, living alone in the loneliest little cottage in the Berkshires; she had a hard life, and she gloried in it.

Not only did Aunt Kate live upon an almost impossibly small income, but she saved out of it, and when Hughes wanted to help her, she refused. She said she had a roof over her head, and enough to eat, and clothing to cover her decently, and that

she wanted nothing more. He thought this admirable.

She admired him, too. It was a part of her philosophy of life to believe that men could never be so noble as women, but, for a man, she thought her nephew remarkably good. So, when he asked her, she came down from her mountains, for the first time in many years.

"Desborough Hughes!" she declared. "I shouldn't do this for any one else on earth."

"I appreciate it, Aunt Kate," he agreed.

But when he explained his intention, her face grew mighty grim.

"Women!" she exclaimed. "You didn't mention that in your letter, Desborough!"

"I know," he said. "But—"

"All you told me," she went on, "was that you wanted to open that house your Uncle Joseph left you out at Green Lake, and that you wanted me to keep house for you and some friends of yours for awhile. Not a word did you say about women."

"I didn't think it would make any difference—"

"Well, it does!" said she. "I don't know that I'm inclined to keep house for a parcel of idle women."

Hughes said that there were only two of them, a mother and a daughter.

"And why can't they keep house for themselves?"

"They're not accustomed to—to country life. They're—"

"I see!" said Mrs. Boles. "A couple of these highfalutin' city people. I may as well tell you, Desborough, that I don't feel disposed to wait on them hand and foot."

"I don't want you to," Hughes asserted. "It's only—" He paused. He saw that he would be obliged to give his aunt some inkling of his plan. "It's like this," he said. "They've got used to that artificial, effete sort of life, and I thought—a week or two of a different sort of life—I thought it might—well—give them a—a new point of view."

"Desborough!" she exclaimed. "They want to marry you. I can see that."

"No, they don't!" he pointed out. "I want to marry them. One of them, I mean."

He had not wished to say that, but it couldn't be helped. His serious face grew scarlet, and he turned away, very greatly dreading the questions and comments his aunt might utter. But, to his surprise, she

said nothing at all for a long time, and presently, to his still greater surprise, she laid her bony hand on his shoulder.

"Very well, my boy!" she said.

He looked at her, but he could not read her face, and he was afraid to ask her what her words and her tone signified. They made him uneasy, and he wasn't very happy, anyhow.

He knew that he could count upon his aunt to set a superb example of fine, old-fashioned simplicity and industry, but that, after all, was not quite what he had intended. His idea had been simply to let Mimi and her mother see what life was like—real life, without false and unnecessary adornments. He hoped that this glimpse would impress them, that was all, so that it would be easier for him to explain to Mimi later on:

"That's what I call the right way to live. Plainly, simply—as you saw it out at Green Lake."

And he did believe that when she actually saw this life in operation, she would admire it. Only, it was important that his Aunt Kate should not be too obviously an example.

There was nothing he could do about it now, though. He had written to his Aunt Kate, and she had come; he had arranged to open the house at Green Lake, and to spend a three weeks' vacation there, and the house was open, and he was in it; he had invited Mrs. Dexter and Mimi for a fortnight, and they were coming this afternoon. The experiment was about to begin. He could only hope.

But this afternoon he found it difficult to do any really effective hoping. An unaccountable depression had come over him; he stood upon the veranda of this house of his, smoking a pipe, and regarding the scene before him with something very like dismay in his eyes.

He had only seen the house once before, and it seemed to him that his outlook must have been biased then by his pleasure in having inherited a house. Certainly it had looked very different, that first time. It had been midsummer, then, and he remembered standing in this same window and looking out at the lake—a glimpse of glittering water seen through the trees.

It was late September, now, and the leaves were thinner, and he could see the lake very well. Lake? It was a pond—a stagnant and sinister little pond, covered

with scum, the source and the refuge of all these swarms and swarms of mosquitoes. And the house itself, which had seemed so dim and cool and restful on that summer day, was strangely altered now.

His late uncle's furniture was good, and quite plain enough to suit any one, but it seemed to him that there wasn't enough of it; the rooms had so bare and desolate a look. And it was damp. He had been here now for a week with his aunt, and she herself said that the dampness had "got into her bones." He thought that was a good way of putting it; the dampness had got into his bones, too; he had never felt so cold in his life. He was positively shivering with it.

"That's all nonsense!" he said to himself, angrily. "The mercury's up to fifty-eight. I can't be cold!"

He was, though—wretchedly, miserably cold. He sauntered down the hall and stood in the doorway of the kitchen, pretending that he wished to chat with his aunt, but really to be near the stove. It did him no good at all; he felt as cold as ever, and the aroma of the plain dinner—a lamb stew—which Mrs. Boles was cooking, filled him with unaccountable distaste. Such was his mood that Mrs. Boles herself had a chilling appearance; her gray hair seemed frosty; her white apron looked as if it would be icy to touch.

The cuckoo clock in the hall struck three. It was a cantankerous old clock, and when it struck three, it meant a quarter to four; time for him to be off. So off he went, out to the barn where he kept his car, in he climbed, and set off for the railway station.

And it was no use insisting that it was the jolting over bad roads which made him shake so, because the shaking kept on after he had alighted and was waiting on the platform. He was shivering violently; his teeth were chattering; his head ached; he felt horribly ill.

Still, when his guests descended from the train, he greeted them cordially; he clenched his teeth to stop their chattering; he forced his stiff lips into a smile; he talked. He drove them back to the house. And that finished him.

"Mr. Hughes! You have a chill!" cried Mrs. Dexter.

"N-n-not!" he insisted.

But nobody would pay any attention to what he said. He was driven upstairs and

ordered to lie down, and Mrs. Boles covered him up with blankets and brought him hot lemonade to drink. He felt so exceedingly miserable that he submitted to all this, but when she mentioned a doctor, he rebelled.

"L-look here!" he said. "I *won't* have a doctor! I mean that! I'll be all right in the morning. I'd be all right now if I had—"

He told Mrs. Boles what he fancied he needed to make him all right, but she sternly disagreed with him. She told him that this remedy he mentioned was simply "poison," and that hot lemonade was beyond measure more beneficial. And, to be sure, the chill was already passing off, only what took its place was even worse. He now became unbearably hot, burning, and she wouldn't let him take off a single one of that mound of blankets.

He remembered afterward that he had not been very amiable toward his aunt. He was so humiliated by this weakness, so anxious about his guests; he seemed to remember shouting at her to let him *alone*, and go downstairs and look after those people. Anyhow, she went, and the instant she was out of sight, he pushed the blankets off onto the floor, and, with a throbbing head, lay back again and closed his eyes.

He heard her come back into the room. She paused near him.

"I tell you I'm all right!" he said, without opening his eyes. "For Heaven's sake, don't leave those people alone! Go downstairs—"

"It's just me," said the smallest voice. "I thought maybe you'd like a cup of tea."

It was Mimi, standing there with a tray. He pulled the counterpane up to his chin, and turned away his face; what he really wanted to do was to cover up his head entirely, and not to answer, so that she could neither see nor hear him. But if he did that, she wouldn't go away, and he had to make her go away immediately. It was unendurable that she should see him like this.

"Oh, thanks!" he said, in an odiously condescending voice. "But there's nothing much wrong with me. Half an hour's nap, and I'll be all right again."

That put a quick stop to her dangerous sympathy.

"Oh!" she observed. "I thought—I'm sorry I disturbed you, Mr. Hughes!"

And out she went. She was offended;

he knew that, but he had to make her go, at any cost. He could endure almost anything with fortitude, but not the thought of Mimi being sorry for him. He never allowed any one to be sorry for him.

As the door closed behind her, he turned his head. She had left the tray on a chair beside him. On it were a cup and a saucer and a plate of his uncle's antique china which he had carefully put away. There was thin bread with butter, cut star-shaped and placed just so.

And there were two doilies. No, not doilies; those, at least, she could not find in this house; they were two little lace handkerchiefs spread out.

And he was ill, helpless, unable to combat with any vigor this insidious attack. In the gathering dusk he lay propped up on one elbow, looking at those terrifying handkerchiefs.

III

HUGHES had said that he would be all right in the morning, but he was surprised to find that he really was so. It seemed incredible that one could feel as he had felt in the evening, and wake in the morning quite well. More than ever was he ashamed of himself. He couldn't have been really ill at all.

The great thing now was to efface the disastrous impression he must have made by this weakness. He must make Mimi realize that he was not the sort of person who was ever ill, or ever laid down, or desired cups of tea. He came downstairs early, and after a few repentant words to Mrs. Boles—who had got down still earlier—he decided to take a walk.

Mimi and Mrs. Dexter would, of course, get up late, as was the habit of city people, and when he met them, he would remark casually that he had had a five-mile walk before breakfast. He went into the library, where he had left his pipe, and he had just taken it in his hand when Mimi appeared in the doorway.

"Oh! I see you're better this morning!" she remarked, polite and nothing more.

"Yes," Hughes replied. "It was nothing. A cold—something of the sort. But, Miss Dexter! Look here! I'm—I'm afraid I wasn't—I didn't— You may have thought I didn't appreciate your great kindness—"

Miss Dexter appeared very much mollified by this tone.

"Well, you weren't yourself," she said, softly.

Hughes was silent for a moment. It was generous of her to think that, but it wouldn't do.

"I'm afraid I was myself," he admitted at last. "I mean—I *am* like that sometimes. I don't want you to think that I'm—"

"I don't," she said softly.

He was greatly disconcerted by this. He glanced at her; she was wearing a rose-colored dress, and it made him a little dizzy. She was so extraordinarily lovely. He did not think it wise to look at her any more or to speak to her just then, so he began to fill his pipe instead.

"Mr. Hughes," she inquired, "have you had your breakfast?"

"No," he answered, "I was waiting for—"

"Then you mustn't smoke," Mimi said firmly. "It's the worst thing in the world before breakfast. Please put that pipe down!"

He was amazed, astounded, by this tone of authority, so much so that he forgot himself and looked at her again. Ordering him about, tyrannizing over him, this outrageous young thing!

He was saved just in the nick of time by Mrs. Dexter's entrance. But he had had his warning. He knew that he would have put down that pipe. He saw clearly that he would be absolutely under the girl's thumb if he didn't look out.

Anyhow, she was getting a salutary example of the plain and simple life. Breakfast from thick, sensible china, set out on a red and white checked cloth, wholesome food, but no trace of demoralizing daintiness. He wondered anxiously what she thought of it; certainly she didn't appear at all disdainful, and certainly her appetite was not adversely affected. And when the meal was ended, she offered, and even insisted, in the most sincere and friendly manner, upon helping Mrs. Boles with the dishes. He was proud of her.

But he was very much disappointed in Mrs. Boles. She wouldn't allow this. She said: "No, child! Indeed you won't!" as if she were defending Mimi against persons who wished to treat her like a Cinderella in the drudge phase. And when Mimi went out of the room to fetch something, both Mrs. Boles and Mrs. Dexter looked after her with the same sort of smile.

"Well! We're only young once!" Mrs. Boles said with a sigh.

"Yes!" Mrs. Dexter agreed, also sighing. "Our troubles come soon enough!"

They meant him. He knew it. They meant that if Mimi should marry him, she would at once cease to be young and happy. This exasperated him, yet it worried him. Was it possible that these two matrons could discern in him qualities fatal to a woman's happiness?

Did they think him capable of any harshness toward that small, gay creature in a pink dress? Well, he wasn't. He knew, and he alone, how he felt about her.

Still, he did not mention his plan of taking them for a fine, healthful cross-country walk that afternoon, and instead he telephoned to the village for a motor car. It came promptly at half past two, but it went back again empty. Nobody cared to go out in it, because Mrs. Boles had a chill.

IV

It was nearly eight o'clock, and Hughes was suffering acutely from hunger. He walked up and down, and up and down, the library, smoking his pipe, and raging inwardly.

"Please don't bother!" he had urged Mrs. Dexter.

And she had said: "Oh, but it's no bother at all! Mimi and I really enjoy getting up a dainty little dinner!"

They were in the kitchen now. He could hear the egg-beater whirring, and, at intervals, their light, agreeable voices, always so good-tempered and affectionate toward each other. They had been at it for hours; they must be exhausted. Every fifteen minutes or so he had appeared in the kitchen doorway, to suggest, to plead, almost desperately:

"Look here! I *wish* you wouldn't! I wish you'd come out of there! Anything will do, you know, any little simple thing—"

But they would not come out. They only laughed at him.

"I wish I could make her see how wasteful and foolish it is to give all this time and effort to a meal!" he thought. "This idea that everything must be so elaborate and 'dainty.' Why, good Lord! I'd rather have bread and cheese—"

Bread and cheese! He thought of a slice of homemade bread with a piece of Swiss cheese lying upon it. He had had nothing

to eat since twelve o'clock. Bread and cheese! How he longed for that! And how he appreciated the plain and simple life which provided meals of no matter what sort at reasonable hours!

It came into his mind that he would go upstairs and see his Aunt Kate again. Just see her. He didn't want to talk to her; simply, it was a comfort to know that she was there, his ally. She felt as he did; their ideals were the same. Plain, sensible people.

He went out of the library and began to mount the stairs. A miserable little jet of gas burned in the lower hall, and another one on the landing, and they both sang a sad little piping tune. The house seemed vast, this evening, a place of black shadows and chilly silence, and many closed, menacing doors.

He thought of Mrs. Dexter's flat, with its homemade furniture and its pathetic brightness. This was, of course, a fine, solid old house, and the flat was a cheap and paltry thing. A girl would be glad, wouldn't she, to leave such a place, to leave the noise and dust of the city, and come here?

Of course there was this unaccountable malady which had attacked first himself and now Mrs. Boles. But it had left him overnight, and she, too, would no doubt be quite recovered in the morning. An odd sort of cold, that was all it was.

He knocked upon the door, and Mrs. Boles called "Come in!" and in he went. The gas was turned low, and by the dim light the room looked remarkably cheerless. Mrs. Boles lay flat on her back, her gray hair in two braids, like an Indian, her gaunt, weather-beaten face immobile, her eyes staring straight before her.

"Desborough!" she said, without turning her head.

He waited, thinking she was going to go on, but she said nothing further.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked. She didn't trouble to answer that.

"Desborough!" she exclaimed. "It's malaria. I thought so yesterday, and now I know it. You've got to get out of here. It's a nasty, unwholesome place."

"But perhaps—" said her nephew, terribly crestfallen.

"There's no 'perhaps' about it," she declared sharply. "I know all about malaria." She was silent for a moment; then her brows drew together in a severe frown.

"That girl!" she remarked. "Just look at that!"

He looked where she pointed, and there, on the chair, he saw a tray. The antique china, the lace handkerchiefs— A great pain seized his heart.

"Mi—Miss Dexter—" he began.

"Yes," said Mrs. Boles. "She brought me some tea. And just look how she fixed up that tray!"

Anger arose in him. He wouldn't listen to a word against Mimi.

"It seems to me Miss Dexter has—" he began again, but once more Mrs. Boles interrupted him.

"I never in my life had any one take so much trouble for me," she announced. "Bread—cut out star-shaped. Her own little handkerchiefs. No, I never."

She paused, and across her grim face came a smile the like of which he had not seen there before.

"The bonnie wee thing!" she said.

"What!" cried Hughes. "What! I mean—why did you say—that?"

"It suits her," said Mrs. Boles. "Her mother was talking to me to-day. She told me that there was an old professor—a Mr. MacAllister—"

"MacAndrews," Hughes explained.

"You've heard about him, then. Well, it seems to me—" Once more she paused. "As soon as I told Mrs. Dexter that this was malaria, and we ought to leave here, they both invited me to visit them. Both of them—without an instant's hesitation. She told me about their flat in the city—and their life. They're not at all well off, but they're happy."

"They know how to live!" Mrs. Boles continued. "Kind, gracious people. They know how to live. Any one could see that. They make every detail—this tray, for instance. Desborough, it's been a revelation to me!"

"Er—yes—" her nephew said absently. "Well, I'd better go downstairs, now, and—and see if I can help them. What? What did you say?"

"I said—you'd better get them to help you!" Mrs. Boles explained.

V

He went out of the room, and closed the door behind him, but he did not go downstairs; he stood there in the dim and drafty hall, thinking. He had been going to show Mimi the right way to live, had he? He

had brought her here, to this house, to these malarial mosquitoes, to this "nasty, unwholesome place." He had made her eat her breakfast from a red and white checked cloth; he had deprived her of doilies and frilled curtains.

He had been the most heartless, the most presumptuous, priggish, despicable ass who had ever lived. Even his aunt had known better. His "plan"! It had served one purpose, though; it had shown him to Mimi as he really was, a blind, obstinate, humorless, cheerless—

She was coming up the stairs now; he knew her light, quick step. So he pretended that he was coming down, and in the middle of the flight they met.

"I was looking for you!" she announced cheerfully. "Dinner's ready!"

He stood before her in silence for a few moments, his head bent; then suddenly he said:

"Mimi!"

Such a miserable voice!

"Oh, what's the matter?" she cried, anxiously.

"I haven't appreciated you!"

His tone was very contrite.

"Heavens!" said Mimi. "I don't care such an awful lot about being appreciated, Mr. Hughes!"

"But I do love you!" he declared. "I always have loved you. Only—I didn't appreciate you. I thought—if you came here—"

"Well," she said, "you were right! You knew perfectly well that if I came here, and saw you in this awful house—and such an awful, dismal life— You knew! It wasn't fair!"

"I never thought of such a thing!" he protested, indignantly. "My plan was—"

"Anyhow, it's too late now," she pointed out. "The harm's done."

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a sinking heart.

"I mean," she replied sternly, "that you've simply got to have somebody to take care of you!"

He looked down at her. The size of her! The age of her!

"But—do you mean—that *you* are going to do that?" he demanded.

"Yes!" she cried. "That's *my* plan!"

He came down onto the step where she was standing. And she had really very little trouble in convincing him of the merits of her plan.

Voice of the Rapids

SNOW-BLIND ON THE TRAIL, PERISHING OF COLD, NEAR MADNESS, THIS MAN WAS RESTORED BY A GHOSTLY SONG

By John J. Rowlands

THE eerie voice of a sledge dog baying at the moon changed suddenly to a sharp challenge. Others of his kind, lying in the deep snow, sprang to their feet and joined in a chorus of snarls and barks, strutting stiff-legged in circles, their gray muzzles lifted to catch a scent.

Allan Leith uttered an inarticulate cry of hope, and plunged, groping wildly with outstretched arms, out of the tent.

"Down! Down!" he shouted, hoarsely.

The barking stopped instantly, and the eight malemutes dropped to their bellies, watching the man. He stood rigid, listening. But the alien sound had gone.

Now all he heard was the thundering of the waters in Red Crow Rapids. The chorus swelled in a slow crescendo, like the deep-toned throbbing of an organ; falling away to a sweet, low trilling; now murmuring, rippling, rushing like the wind in the pines; now only a liquid frothing in the cold, still air.

Slowly the man relaxed his tenseness, and, with a groan of despair, stumbled, groping, back into the tent.

Lac Le Seul's plain of ice, swept clean of snow by the winds, gleamed blue and white in the light of the pale full moon. In the sky the northern lights flowed in vertical streams of pastel green, and brushed silver, and rose—waxing, waning, falling away into the distance, only to sweep back with frightful swiftness. And the stars blinked like tiny signal lights from ships in a dark blue sea.

Bonds of ice and snow bound the wilderness. Now and then the cracking of trees, stung by the stabbing lances of the frost, broke the hush. And always the rapids thundered, rushed and roared, until even that sound seemed part of the silence.

Leith clasped his snow-blind eyes, grit-

ting his teeth with the maddening pain that had throbbed deep in the sockets for four long days. His head was on fire with the agony of it, and the roar of the rapids drummed in his ears until unconsciously he put out his hands to push the sound away, and clasped his head to shut it out. But it waited like some persistent devil until, when his ears were free, it rushed back to fill him with its deep-throated turmoil.

In his despair the tales he had heard of Watigo, the bush madness, came back to torture and bewilder him. The ghostly voices of lonely rapids had driven men insane. Even now he heard strange sounds in the water; the ringing of church bells, the crash of cymbals, blaring horns, laughter, and the voice of a girl singing. Three nights he had heard that voice!

The tent was cold, and outside the fire was dead. All the wood he had cut in those hours of panic when, in a creeping crimson twilight, he had worked desperately to store up fuel against the total darkness, was gone.

The man stirred, feeling for the ax. Then he tugged at the lashings of the sledge, which he had drawn within the tent three days before. He worked patiently with cold-stiffened fingers until at length he had pieced together a line fifty feet long. One end he made fast to the sledge, and the other was tied about his waist.

The thought that, in his blindness, he might be lost within a few feet of his camp filled him with terror. He pulled nervously at the knots before feeling his way out of the tent, ax in hand, to search for wood.

He remembered that the shelter faced the east. Lac Le Seul lay to the north, and in the opposite direction serried ranks of black spruce, blended to a flat, dark shadow, stretched away into the ghostly

reaches of a trackless swamp. He turned in that direction, moving cautiously, feeling with his feet.

Finally he found a small tree and carefully set to work. After an age, it fell. Pulling on his guide line, he dragged it back to the tent, and in a few minutes his patient efforts were rewarded by the crackling of fire in the resinous twigs. Again and again he groped out with painful progress to bring back fuel, until at length several small trees were piled near the fire, now blazing cheerfully.

As the warmth crept into his cold body, Leith was all but overwhelmed by a subtle drowsiness. The first two nights he had slept, curled in his eider down robe on the sledge load. But after that he dared not risk it.

He had paced for hours, thumping his body desperately to keep the blood moving in his veins. To sleep would have meant to slumber to the end of time. But now creeping tentacles of weariness wound themselves about his brain, strangling the small voice that cried:

"Don't sleep! Don't sleep!"

The will to keep awake was losing its power to command. He wanted to rest, just sleep, and his head sank lower. The roar of the rapids became a soft lullaby; a droning, seductive voice that wooed his senses into the twilight of consciousness. The pain in his eyes seemed less acute—his chin was almost on his chest.

Suggi, the big lead dog of the team, had come to snuggle close to Leith. Now he was on his haunches, his shaggy head close to the bowed shoulders of his master. Suddenly he uttered a low growl and slowly lifted to his feet, peering into the shadows toward the west.

Leith struggled out of the soothing drowsiness that beset his brain, and sat up, listening indifferently. The rapids, thundering, rushing; he heard that, of course—the drone of the waters, musical sounds like the wind in silver pipes, the tinkling of little bells.

Then it came, clear and sweet, "The Voyageur's Love Song," *in the voice of a girl!*

Leith was awake in every sense, now. Could it be that the voice was real? Straining to catch the sound, it dawned upon him that for three nights he had been listening, not to a voice born of madness, but to a human singer.

Each time it came the dogs had barked; he might have known they could hear only earthly sounds. Only men heard the ghostly voices of the rapids.

Even now the dogs were uneasy, and when one barked the others joined, until, at Leith's sharp command, they fell into silence.

The man sprang up, and, stumbling in the snow that seemed to pull knowingly at his feet, made his way to the tent and brought out his gun. Flames belched from the muzzle, and the hush of the wilderness was shattered into a thousand flying echoes when he pressed the trigger. Three times he fired, then listened tensely.

The voice sang on, rising and falling with the cadence of the song. He knew then that his signals had not been heard. She must be near the rapids where the roar of the water would drown any sound coming from afar. The thought filled him with a new and more poignant despair.

He crouched again near the fire, holding his hands outstretched to the grateful warmth, and Suggi, sitting close by, stretched out his sharp muzzle and gently licked his master's fingers.

The touch of the dog's cold nose was an inspiration, and hope came again. It was a faint chance, he knew, but anything was worth trying.

Leith snatched at the line about his waist and guided himself back to the tent. After rummaging feverishly in the depths of the sledge load, he found a bit of paper, and, at last, a stubby pencil.

He wrote with painful care, maddened by the blindness, spacing the letters far apart in the hope his message would be legible. When it was done he pushed the paper into the toe of a spare moccasin, and, going out, tied the foot piece about Suggi's neck.

The beating of his heart throbbed in his ears until it seemed he could hear nothing else. He leaned toward the west, straining, and then, as if the involuntary movement had brought him nearer, the voice came clearly. It was on the last verse of the song.

Shaking in his excitement, Leith dropped to his knees beside the dog and took the great head in his hands.

"It's our last chance, Suggi, boy. I'm depending on you to pull us out of this. Listen!"

He felt the dog's sharp ears rigidly erect.

"Hear it?"

Suggi uttered a reassuring whine, and Leith, lifting the moccasin to the beast's quivering nose, gently pushed him toward the west.

"Go find her, Suggi! Go find! *Vite!*" he shouted.

The dog sprang away.

Listening again for the voice, Leith heard it clearly, lifting to linger for a moment on the last high note of the song. Then it died away.

And the rapids boomed, and roared, and throbbed.

Leith stood as if rooted to the spot for several minutes, a tall, gaunt figure in his white blanket-cloth coat, bound at the waist with a wide scarlet sash, the tasseled ends of which he fingered nervously. Then he turned again to the fire, and, fumbling in the snow, found the little pile of wood, and carefully, grudgingly placed two sticks upon the embers.

Waiting was agony, for time dragged by in maddening silence. He wondered how long it was since the dog had gone out into the night, and he began counting, cutting a notch in a stick for each estimated minute. When he had cut sixty he turned the stick, and began again, until two eternal hours had passed. Still no sound came to raise his hopes.

After that he lost interest in time. A strangely insidious and pleasant languor crept through him, dulling his brain, pressing at the burning eyelids. His head was so heavy that he could not hold it up, and the fire was warm and comfortable, so warm and soft and warm—warm—warm—

"Allan, me lad," the factor was saying, "ye must have this dispatch in the hands of Ian Laird at Caribou Factory by Christmas. 'Tis now the second day of the month, and not hard winter yet. With good luck ye will make it, and time to spare. Let nothing stop ye; 'tis a special dispatch come from far-away London."

But almost at once a bitter cold wind, laden with snow, had swept down out of the north. Another week of this low temperature would muffle the voices of even the most precipitous rapids in a mask of ice.

A dog nudged closer to the man for warmth, and he started to wakefulness. His weary brain had taken him back to Beaver-house Post. Even now he could see them all at the edge of the lake, watching him

start on the three-hundred-mile journey to Caribou Factory.

The fire was so warm—warm, softly warm. Its pleasant heat poured into his veins and hurried the sluggish blood. It flooded his brain with its flickering orange light, and soothed his brow with seductive fingers. His head sank lower—so warm—so warm—

Something cold touched his face, and Leith, stretched at full length on the snow, struggled and clutched with outreaching hands, as a man who falls while dreaming. He could not rise. His body was heavy, so heavy he could not lift it, and some one was calling. He could hear the voice, a woman's voice, faint and far away.

"*Monsieur! Monsieur!* Wake up! You are freezing!"

If the warmth that suffused his body and held him powerless was freezing, Allan Leith was happy at that moment to go on freezing. But he couldn't be freezing. He was warm and comfortable; all the air was softly yellow; the color of a lemon.

He felt himself moving smoothly, lifting, now falling, going forward with a strangely pleasant motion. He was in his trundle bed at home in Edinburgh again. He could feel his mother's hands about his shoulders, tucking the soft blanket about his neck. He saw her face dimly. Then she snuffed out the candle and tiptoed from the violet shadows.

II

LEITH awoke with a sensation of being detached from all that he had known before. His groping fingers touched the edge of a blanket tucked close about his neck and shoulders. He moved his arm out and felt a log wall, and the edge of what he knew must be a bunk. And the air all about him was warm and filled with the pleasant steaming odor of cooking food.

The pain in his eyes came back, boring into his head like polished augers, and then he was aware of a strange prickling sensation in his right leg. He tried to sit up, but fell back, and a soft voice—he knew it for the voice of the rapids singer—spoke:

"You must lie still, *monsieur*. You are ill, and one foot was frozen. Lie still and rest."

"Lie still and rest." Leith thought those words had never seemed sweeter, more comforting. He tried to think back, but his thoughts whirled in mad and not

unpleasant confusion. Not until he raised his hand to touch his throbbing, burning eyes did he realize that they were tightly bandaged.

"How long have I been here?" he asked with sudden anxiety.

"Three days, *monsieur*," the girl's voice came from across the room.

"You found me?" he inquired curiously.

"Your dog came with the message," she told him. "I went for you then, and you were asleep in the snow and near to the White Death."

For awhile Leith lay in silence. He could hear her moving about the room, and wondered what she was like. Then he said:

"My name is Allan Leith. What is yours?"

"Marise Faber," she replied.

Her voice had a peculiar boyish tone, which for some reason reminded him of the note of the rain bird. Perhaps it was a certain wistfulness that suggested this resemblance.

"I haven't thanked you for coming to me," he said. "I could not have lasted much longer. Why didn't you send some one else?"

"There was no one else to go," she explained. "This is a new post. My father, who is in charge, went to Caribou Factory four days ago for a supply of traps."

Then, as if she had thought of it for the first time, she asked:

"How did you happen to send the dog?"

"I heard you singing," he answered.

"At first I thought I was mad; that it was the voice of the rapids. But the dogs howled, and I knew then it was a human voice."

A ripple of laughter greeted this.

"Was my voice so bad that the dogs howled?"

"It was wonderful," he told her seriously. "Do you sing every evening?"

The wistful note crept into her voice.

"Nearly always when the air is still. I love the roar of the rapids. I hear beautiful things in the river. It is wild and free, not tied to one place as I am. I love to think of it flowing dark between the forest toward Hudson's Bay, and I dream of its waters mixing with the sea and going far away to other lands. So I sing to it every night, and its voices sing back to me."

A little silence followed, and he was about to speak when she said:

"How silly that must sound to you."

Leith smiled.

"No," he reassured her, "not silly, but fine. If I could sing I'd make my song to the Canada geese when they fly south in the autumn. They are wild and free, too, and I am tied here. I hate, loathe, this cold, lonely wilderness. Six years ago I came to Beaverhouse Post from Edinburgh, to be a clerk. For awhile I was happy, but the last three years have been long ones. Just my luck to be chosen to make this trip. If it hadn't been for you it would have been my last."

"I'm glad you understand," she said gratefully. "My father's home was in Montreal, and when my mother died he sent me there to school. I've wanted to go back ever since. He loves the North. I hate it!"

Leith, who had raised himself to his elbow, lay back, and for a time there was silence. She was no ordinary girl of the fur country, he knew. Her voice, her thoughts, were different from those of the women he had known at the posts, and he found himself strangely stirred; possessed of an overpowering curiosity to see her.

She was beautiful; no one with such a voice could be anything else. And she was tall and slender, with black hair, he told himself, with a new sensation of pleasant warmth in his heart.

"Do you think I could see if the bandages were taken off?" he finally ventured, raising a hand to them.

"No, no!" she warned, suddenly anxious. "To-morrow or the next day, perhaps. Light might do great harm now."

"But I'm carrying a dispatch to Caribou Factory," he protested, "and I've got to get there by Christmas. If I've been here three days, this must be the eighteenth. How many days' march is the factory?"

"Four days in good weather."

"Then I must leave here not later than the twenty-first to be sure of arriving on time."

"If your eyes are well and your foot is better, you can," she told him. "It would mean death to start unless you are fit. You must break trail all the way."

"But I've got to get there Christmas Day; no later," he persisted, stubbornly.

Her rippling laughter annoyed him, but when she spoke her voice was serious.

"Don't worry, M. Leith," she said. "If you are not strong enough to go alone, I shall take you when the time comes."

"But you couldn't," he objected. "It's a hard trip; too hard for a girl."

Her laughter filled the room.

"Of course I can," she assured him. "I have been over the trail many times."

Leith would have argued, but she stopped him.

"Now, not another word," she warned. "I shall do what I think best."

Those who knew Allan Leith well, and sometimes called him the obstinate young Scot, would have been amazed to know he made no answer.

III

WHEN the girl removed the bandages from Leith's eyes the next day, he could see only a wall of gray light, which brought new and terrible pain that poured through his head like liquid fire, until he was forced to ask her to replace the bandages.

Something like an electric current sped through him when Marise's cool fingers touched his temples and forehead. His heart thumped strangely when she bent close, adjusting the bandage with quick skill, and a faint perfume came to him. When she went away he suddenly wanted her near him again.

"I've a bit of a headache," he told her a little later. "Perhaps if you had time to rub my brow it would help."

"It might," she agreed.

And the girl, smiling to herself, went to him and gently smoothed his forehead until he fell asleep.

When the bandage was taken away the next morning, Leith could see quite clearly. The snow blindness had gone almost as swiftly as it came. Instantly his eyes sought the girl. He uttered an exclamation of surprise, and she, bending over him, drew back quickly.

"What's the matter?"

"Why—why—you're different!" Leith finally stammered. "I had tried to picture you. I thought you were tall, and dark haired. Instead, you're just a bit of a girl, and your hair"—he was amazed at himself—"is all the colors of the autumn leaves blended to one shade I cannot name."

Marise laughed, musical notes that filled the room. Then she blushed; but no more redly than the man. Both were suddenly silent, and she moved quickly about, working at the stove.

The slender figure in heavy woolen skirt

and gray flannel shirt waist, with a scarlet ribbon at the throat, held Leith's gaze. When she bent over the steaming kettle he saw the ivory whiteness of her curving neck, the delicate rounding of fragile shoulders, and flaming cheeks.

"I think the lake route will be the best, for you will have to ride on the sledge most of the way," Marise said when they had finished their dinner. "It will be easier on the dogs, for the snow on the waterways is light."

Leith stared in surprise.

"But I'll be able to walk to-morrow," he expostulated. "I can make it alone, all right; see—" He stood up, testing the foot that had been frozen.

The girl ordered him to sit down, but Leith, smiling at her anxiety, took several steps. He did not, however, admit the pain of the effort.

"You're not much better at walking than a loon," she told him, laughing. "We'll take the lake and river trail, which leaves only a ten mile mush overland when you strike across from Traders' Lake to Blanche River."

"But I can go alone, all right," Leith insisted.

"No," she argued, "you can't—not with that foot. I'm going with you."

Women had always been a mystery to Leith. He couldn't understand them, and now the note of finality in her voice puzzled him; and there was the disconcerting thought of being led by a slip of a girl.

"No," he said decisively, "you can't. It's not a task for a girl."

Her eyes flashed, and Leith saw her long, white fingers clench into ridiculously small fists.

"Besides," he added quickly, sensing an outburst, "the Keewatin Fur Company's men are north of us. Windigo Joe is somewhere up there. You know his kind. It's no trip for a girl, I tell you." His voice softened. "But it's fine of you to want to go with me."

"How stubborn you are," she finally remarked, her cheeks very pink. "We both are servants of the company. The dispatch must go through to the factory by Christmas. You can't make it alone, and you know it. I'm going, whether you like or not, and arguing won't change my mind. We probably will meet my father on the trail. If not, he will be at the factory, and I can come home with him."

Leith knew she was in earnest, and he capitulated with a sheepish grin.

"Good enough," he said, "but I dread to think what might happen if we meet any of Windigo Joe's men. I'd rather face them alone."

"Two heads are better than one," she assured him lightly; "but don't worry, there won't be any trouble."

Leith watched her with frank admiration while she went over the sledge-load, which she had piled in a corner the day she found him.

"We'll take a tarpaulin for a lean-to and leave the tent," she suggested. "It'll be lighter."

She discarded all but the barest necessities, with quick decision, until the load had been reduced in bulk and weight.

"What's this?" she asked, lifting a thin, narrow package from the pile.

"The dispatch, cause of all this trouble," he replied, bitterly. "They sit over there in London where they seldom see more than a flurry of snow, and send dispatches as if delivering them was no more trouble than going across the lake. Lord! I'm sick of it all—the country and the cold."

"Better carry the dispatch in your belt from now on," she suggested, and went on with the task of assembling the load to have it ready for lashing to the sledge in the morning.

It was cold and dark and as still as death when they started the journey to Caribou Factory. The dogs, eager to be away, sprang from their haunches and bent to the traces, until, when the sledge gained momentum, they trotted easily, tails curled stiffly over their backs, on the white bosom of Lac Le Seul.

Although warned by Marise that walking would further injure his foot and delay their progress, Leith, chagrined that a girl should bear the hardships of trail breaking, insisted upon taking the lead at the start. A mile, and another mile, of pain and slow marching convinced him of the wisdom of her advice, and he reluctantly took his place on the sledge, assuring himself that he would be able to mush after another day.

Once, when they stopped to rest the dogs, the girl turned her face to the south, and they listened to the thunderous voice of Red Crow Rapids, booming, booming, booming through the darkness.

"Wild and free and never still," Marise said a little wistfully; then to the dogs:

"Mush on! Mush on!" and the team started.

They talked little, for the girl walked ahead of the dogs, lifting her snowshoes with easy grace in a stride that carried them steadily northward.

Deprived of exercise, Leith suffered intensely from the cold. It penetrated the heavy folds of the robes in which he was wrapped, numbing his body. It cut his face like tiny sharp blades, and with every breath its icy fangs sank deep into his lungs, slashing, probing the innermost recesses of his body, until, when the frost laid a smothering film across his dilated nostrils, he gasped as one strangling.

Many times during the days they swung toward the dark wall of the forest to build a fire to warm themselves. And at night, crouching under the shelter of the slanting square of their lean-to, they took turns in keeping the fire blazing in the endless battle against the creeping White Death that lurked always in the shadows.

They drank pannikins of steaming black tea, and chewed the tough sinews of smoked moose meat in monotonous repetition, conscious night and day, yet contemptuous, of the fate that would overtake them if they relaxed their vigilance against the cold.

For three days they moved through the still, white wilderness. Constant exposure to the cold had started Leith's foot aching again, and he gritted his teeth with the pain. And the glare of the snow reddened his eyes until they seemed to be reservoirs of liquid fire. He rubbed charcoal from a burned stick around them to subdue the glare.

Hours dragged by in tormenting monotony. The cold, white miles were endless; progress seemed so slow. Numbed by the intense cold, the snow became to Leith the symbol of all suffering. Everywhere he looked snow clogged the earth. It bound the low hills, lying fold on fold on their rounding crests like an ancient winding cloth.

Its whiteness filled the forest, clinging to the trunks of the trees, bending their straining branches beneath its weight. Its sepulchral pallor filled the valleys and lay flat upon the lakes. Dry as dust in the terrible cold, it held the world in silence, unbroken white as far as the eye could see on earth. And the sky above was gray.

Even the blanket-cloth coats Marise and Leith wore were white, and he wondered

angrily what strange turn of mind had brought men of the North to choose the very color of the long and dreary winter. The wide crimson sash about his waist alone gave relief to his hungry craving for color. He gazed upon it until it seemed that the blood-red thing gave up warmth, and he was grateful.

Hour after hour he sat, huddled low on the sledge, beaten down by the cold from which there was no escape. The insidious hissing of the sledge runners in the dry snow arose to a maddening, ceaseless screeching in the leaden silence.

Only the girl, walking with head bent, and the dogs, rippling splotches of gray, moved in that frozen world. The trees at the edge of the lake stood straight and still, held rigid by bonds of ice; even the air seemed frozen to glassy brittleness.

Again it was the invisible hand of the cold that deprived them of Leith's rifle, their only weapon against the perils of the wilderness. Weary of pemmican and jerked moose flesh, Leith fired at a rabbit which appeared when they stopped to make tea on the shore of the lake. There was a sharp explosion, and the barrel of the gun snapped off near the breech where Leith's hand had warmed a few inches of the ice-cold steel while it rested across his knees in the sledge.

The incident filled Leith with black depression, in which he saw the misfortunes of his journey as a conspiracy of the elements to destroy him. He had not even the satisfaction of bagging the rabbit which cost him his rifle.

It was as if the spirit of the wilderness, sensing his hatred for all it held, was retaliating with grim heartlessness. Food they could get by snaring rabbits, if the need arose, but in case of attack he had no weapon but his sheath knife and his fists.

Immediately danger seemed nearer and his anxiety increased. Not even Marise's cheerful assurance that they would go through with flying colors could disperse his unhappy thoughts.

They crawled like a black worm with many feet across the white reaches of Le Seul and over the portage to Moon Lake, and on and on across the plains of snow—a dark speck in a white world. To Leith, filled with an ever-growing admiration, the girl who mushed patiently ahead of the sledge appeared endowed with superhuman endurance.

She made no complaint, although he could see her eyes were red with the glare of the snow, and knew she must be chilled by the pressing, gnawing cold. He kept his suffering to himself, and when she suggested that he bandage his eyes, he lied about the pain that burned deep in his head.

When at last they made camp at the end of the third day in the shelter of a little island at the northern end of Musquash Lake, the man's spirits arose.

"We should make the factory to-morrow by noon," Marise said when, after the shelter had been erected and the fire was leaping high, they sat down to warm themselves. "We've made fast time; and there's less than fifteen miles to go."

Happy at the thought of reaching their goal, they chatted gayly long after the tea had grown cold in the smoke-blackened pail.

"What has become of all your Keewatin men?" she chided him. "All your worry was for nothing. Here we are almost within hailing distance of the factory, and not a man in sight, never a storm to hold us back."

Leith laughed good-naturedly. He was happier than he had been for days; the girl's cheerfulness was contagious, and the dangers he had feared seemed for the moment far away; half forgotten, evil dreams.

To-morrow they would feel the comforting warmth of the big stove in the factor's house; there would be tempting food, and the suffering of the merciless cold and the hardships of the long march over the snows would be forgotten. The throbbing pain in his foot seemed less acute, and the tormenting fire in his eyes slowly subsided.

When darkness settled over the wilderness the cold air stirred, bringing out of the north the familiar sound of rushing water. Marise stopped talking to listen, holding a finger at her lips.

"The waters of old Winisik," she said. "We used to hear them from the factory."

As they listened, it grew stronger, a deep booming like the roll of war drums coming through the sounds of battle, and the girl, held by its spell, sat gazing into the fire. Leith watched her.

Slowly, very slowly, she turned, as if hypnotized by the sound, and her voice, sweet and clear in the immeasurable silence, broke into "The Voyageur's Love Song." She sang with face uplifted to the starry

heavens, her eyes shining, a little figure of fragile beauty bathed in the orange glow of the fire.

And Leith, listening spellbound, heard the rush of lonely waters, crooning winds in the pines, the silvery tinkle of rushing brooks, and the rising cry of yearning—

"Bear him swiftly, Moosonee,
Paddle dipping, home to me.
O Spirit of the Waters Deep
Bring him back to where I weep."

Her voice died away to silence, and she turned, as if suddenly conscious of his presence, to look at him shyly, and her cheeks reddened.

"It was beautiful," he told her. "I'll always remember your voice of the rapids."

Marise smiled faintly and turned away. Suddenly, Leith knew he loved her, and wanted her more than anything else in life. He would have taken her in his arms and crushed her close to him; he wanted to touch her hair, now flaming bronze and gold in the firelight, to press her soft, red lips.

Instead, he found in the need for more fuel an excuse to hide the pleasant confusion that filled him, and he hobbled out into the shadows for more wood.

IV

LONG after Marise had gone to rest, rolled in the warm folds of her eider down robe at the back of the lean-to, Leith sat by the fire, lost in dreams. The lake lay still and pallid in the full radiance of the moon, while at his back the spruce forest loomed, a black, mysterious tangle.

The dogs had burrowed deep into the snow for the night. Only the sharp crack of frost in the trees, and now and then the ominous thunder of the lake ice contracting in the intense cold, broke the hush that hung like a fog over the wilderness.

Abruptly, while he sat gazing into the red heart of the fire, Leith had the feeling he was being watched. His first impulse was to leap to his feet, but upon second thought he realized that a quick move would betray his suspicions. The hair on the back of his neck tingled, and he could feel the steady gaze of invisible eyes.

Finally, under the pretext of throwing more wood on the fire, he turned and searched the dark forest shadows with his eyes. There was no sound, no sign of danger. He walked beyond the circle of fire,

but there was nothing to be seen, and finally he reassured himself with the thought that it was nothing more than a prowling animal.

At any rate, Keewatin men were not likely to be encountered so close to the factory. He even chuckled at his quick suspicion, natural enough after having been on guard constantly during the march. But now they were safe, and he rolled himself in his blankets close to the fire, secure in the belief there was nothing to fear.

Hours later that strange sense that comes to men who live in the solitudes of the North, caused Leith to open his eyes. He knew at once that all was not well, yet in the first drowsy moments of awakening he could not tell what it was.

The fire had died down to a bed of dull red coals, and the lake and the woods were lost in impenetrable velvet darkness. The moon no longer shed its radiance on the snow.

He lay still, watching through half closed eyelids, straining to catch any sound. Then something moved, a shadow just beyond the faint glow of the dying fire. It moved again, and, gazing at the spot, Leith made out the faint outline of a man. Still he waited, his heart pounding in his ears until he feared its thumping would be heard by the marauder.

The shadow moved with the caution of a lynx creeping upon a rabbit, coming nearer. The dogs, buried in the snow, were too cold and tired to resent the approach if they sensed it.

The sledge, with most of the load still lashed to it, had, as usual, been turned on its side to keep the runners free of frost, and Leith saw that the stranger was creeping slowly toward it.

In a flash he thought of the dispatch safely reposing in a pouch in his belt, and he remembered the old factor's warning when he left Beaverhouse Post:

"Beware of Windigo Joe and his men, lad, for they'll stop at naught to get the company's dispatches."

The short space of time in which Leith lay rigid, watching the mysterious intruder creep onward, seemed an age. At last the man stood by the sledge, examining the lashings, and casting sidelong glances toward Leith.

He was a short, thickset man, and once, when he turned, Leith saw through slitted eyes that he was a half-breed. Then the

man drew a knife and quickly slashed the thongs that bound the load.

In an instant Leith sprang from his blankets and leaped at the figure, now bending over the contents of the sledge. The man whirled in time to see Leith coming, and with incredible swiftness he turned and ran, with long strides of his narrow snowshoes, into the shadows of the forest. Leith tried to follow, but, lacking snowshoes, he sank deep into the snow.

Marise had awakened, and she hurried to his side.

"What was it?" she asked anxiously, in a whisper.

Leith gave a brief account of what had happened, and they went back to the fire.

"One of Windigo Joe's men, I'm certain," Leith said a little later. "If we had arms it would be different, but now that the rifle is gone we will fight with our wits, and I think the wisest and safest thing to do is break camp and push on toward the factory at once. Windigo Joe doesn't give up as easily as that. When the man gets back to the gang, they'll send others. We haven't a moment to lose."

The girl agreed, and they broke camp, stopping only long enough to brew tea to warm themselves for the march. The sledge load was again securely lashed, and they started north into the black maw of the night.

Even the dogs seemed to know there was something unusual in the hurried move, and they pulled strongly. Leith, huddled in his robes on the sledge, could hear their labored breathing and the rhythmic swish of the girl's snowshoes above the soft, unbroken hissing of the runners. Traveling through the darkness was difficult, and the girl led the team along the ice close to the shore where the white snow line could be seen dimly a few yards away.

When the faint light of dawn flowed up in the eastern sky their pace quickened, and Leith scanned the sinister shadows at the edge of the lake for signs of danger until his eyes ached with the constant strain of watching. The tension increased as they reached the northern tip of Trader's Lake where the trail led overland to Blanche River.

As soon as they entered the somber aisles of the forest, where the snow lay deep, Leith tied on his snowshoes, and, despite the girl's protests, went ahead to break trail. The thongs chafed his weak foot,

and every toiling step sent a burning pain through his body. The girl plodded close behind, and the dogs, floundering in the snow to their bellies, followed at her heels, straining at the traces.

It was on the portage that trouble was to be expected from the Keewatin men. The black battalions of stunted spruce, standing in little groups as if for protection from the merciless arctic winds, offered ideal cover for ambush.

Leith kept his eyes fixed on the trail, scrutinizing every clump of trees, peering around each little turn and twist. But there was no sign of life, no sound to break the pulsing silence.

Hours later, when, after toiling over the crest of a low hill, they saw the white stretches of the river less than a quarter of a mile away, Leith gave voice to his relief.

"The worst is over," he said, when the dogs dropped to the snow to rest for a few minutes. "The factory can't be more than three hours' march. We outwitted those beggars by moving at once."

The girl nodded and smiled.

"Not much danger of them bothering us now," she added. "We're too near headquarters for that."

The knowledge that they were nearing the end of the long, white trail banished the anxiety that had kept their nerves tense during the long march through the woods. Leith's spirits soared with a sense of triumph, and he led the way toward the river with a sensation of profound satisfaction that they had come through without encountering the Keewatin men.

They were within a few hundred feet of the river, and Leith had unconsciously quickened his pace in his eagerness to get out in the open, when he felt a tug at his coat. He turned quickly to find the girl standing close behind him.

"Did you hear anything?" she asked in an anxious whisper.

The man shook his head.

"What was it?"

"Like a low cough, I think," she told him, peering through the trees.

They listened, suddenly tense again, in the breathless chill.

"Must have been one of the dogs," Leith suggested after a few moments. "I hear nothing."

"My imagination, perhaps," Marise admitted. "Guess my nerves are a little jumpy. Let's go on."

They had gone less than fifty paces when, upon turning a sharp bend in the trail, Leith's keen eyes caught the form of a man lurking behind a tree several feet to the right of the trail. Their eyes met, and the stranger walked confidently out into the open.

"*Bon jour*," he said, in deep-throated tones.

Leith's greeting came in a level voice that revealed none of the misgivings he felt. He knew the other in a flash, although he had never laid eyes upon him until that moment.

There was no mistaking the huge frame, the heavy brows and black stubble beard. He saw, too, the white scar that crossed the big man's left cheek from the eye to the lobe of his ear. Only one man in the north answered that description. It was Windigo Joe!

The man stood with legs wide spread, arms folded across his chest, and Leith saw that he had been drinking. His black eyes stared from red-rimmed lids, and their sensuous appraisal of the girl made Leith's blood boil. Then his heavy lips parted in a leering smile.

"You come far?" he asked, turning his gaze upon Leith again.

It was a question any one meeting another in the wilderness would ask, and Leith answered civilly, studying the other closely.

Here before him stood Windigo Joe, the man whose black exploits had become legends in the fur country. His hatred for the company was almost a religion with him, for in the dim past he had served it, and had been discharged for dishonesty. From that day he opposed it with fanatical zeal, sowing seeds of discontent among the Indian trappers, bartering cheap rum for priceless furs, and harrying the company's loyal runners.

Time and time again dispatches had disappeared from packets on the lonely trails, yet so cunningly did the man work that never was there one who could swear it was he who had committed the robbery.

And when agents of the Keewatin Company came into the North, seeking a leader for their field forces, they found in Windigo Joe and his black hatred for the Hudson Company a rare asset in their nefarious business. And so, emboldened by support of the new organization, the man continued to make trouble for the old company.

He worked alone most of the time, going about unarmed, except for a knife, which, Leith was quick to note, he carried at his belt. The disappearance of dispatches had become more frequent, for such information was of vital interest to the new company, and every factor throughout the length and breadth of Keewatin Land rested uneasily until the winter packets arrived.

"Beaverhouse! *Mon Dieu*, so far!" the man exclaimed with a show of surprise. "It is not often that the company sends a lone *courier des bois*"—he hesitated, and the red-rimmed eyelids became slits—"unless dispatches be of great importance?"

Leith had anticipated some such question, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"It is but my part to serve the company," he said, quick to note the answering glint of hate in the other's sinister eyes.

So far the man had said and done nothing to reveal his line of action, for action there would be before they saw the last of him, Leith was certain. He was trying to fathom the other's thoughts when Windigo Joe spoke again. He had turned toward Marise, and he leered when his black eyes fastened upon her.

"And the *mademoiselle*—she came so far, too?" he asked with slow deliberation, flashing a quick glance at the young man.

Leith caught the cunning inference of the man's words. Instantly the other's plan of action dawned upon him, and the blood pounded in Leith's temples as his anger mounted. He tried to hide his feelings, for he fully realized the strength of his huge opponent. He left the question unanswered, and waited, every muscle in his body rigid.

Windigo Joe seemed not to expect an answer, for he spoke again, his eyes on the girl who stood, pink-cheeked, gazing at him with defiant, flashing eyes.

"She is so beautiful, so ver' beautiful," he murmured in oily tones. "You are very fortunate, *monsieur*." He looked at Leith, and slowly winked with evil suggestiveness.

V

It was the challenge!

Leith's face went white with rage. The man had set his stage with devilish ingenuity, and maneuvered him into a position in which no one with a sense of honor could do else but fight. And he knew, too, that the whole scheme was only a means by which Windigo Joe hoped to gain posses-

sion of the dispatch now safely reposing in a pouch about his waist.

In addition to all that he had heard of the man, Leith's swift appraisal of Windigo Joe was disquieting. The leering brute towered a full head above him, and, as far as he could judge, was fifty pounds his superior in weight. Still, there was only one thing to do.

Leith struck with lightning swiftness, and his fist caught Windigo Joe squarely on the chin. Instead of rocking him, however, the blow had no more effect than to make the man shake his head. He belloyed an oath and sprang at Leith, striking out with huge fists like an enraged bear.

Both men were still on snowshoes, but soon the snow was packed where they circled for advantage, and Leith, with a quick lifting of the heels and a forward thrust, freed himself of the cumbersome webs. In that unguarded moment Windigo Joe struck, and the blow sent Leith staggering to his knees.

The man was towering above him before he had time to recover, and he felt the great apeline hands close about his throat. Tighter and tighter they squeezed. The breath whistled in Leith's throat, and he felt himself whirling in a crimson mist.

It was a cry of terror from Marise that spurred him to another desperate effort, and suddenly he remembered a trick taught him by an old fighter at home.

He clutched and fastened on the two little fingers of the hands that encircled his neck, and wrenched them back until Windigo Joe, with a cry of rage and pain, was forced to loose his hold. Gasping for breath, Leith sprang to his feet.

Despite the fact he was still handicapped by his snowshoes, Windigo Joe moved with amazing agility, and he was raining blows on Leith's head and shoulders before he had time to defend himself. He leaped back and, still dazed, waited for the next rush of the big man.

This time he side-stepped quickly, and the man's blow missed. Leith took advantage of the opening to swing at the other's head, and when the blow landed a sense of satisfaction restored his confidence.

Although he fully realized the great strength of the man, Leith saw that his opponent was a rough and tumble fighter, who knew nothing of boxing. The knowledge gave him an advantage, and he proceeded to lead Windigo Joe into a series of

wild rushes that accomplished nothing and started the giant to breathing hard.

Leith knew that the man was seeking to grapple, and he also knew he would stand little chance of survival if the long, outspread arms ever closed about him. Time and again Windigo Joe rushed upon him with savage fury.

Once he staggered Leith with a blow to the right eye, but paid for it with a stinging clip on the side of his head. When he came close, Leith could hear his labored breathing, a sound like the sucking of wind in loose pine bark.

Seconds seemed ages. Leith was sick from a terrific bombardment of blows to the head. For a moment the frightful sensation that he could hold out no longer gripped his heart, but thought of the girl watching the battle with eyes wide with fear, kept him fighting on. He brought into play all the tricks of boxing he remembered, and was encouraged to find he could outgeneral Windigo Joe to the extent of gaining time.

Finally, the big man kicked away his snowshoes and came at Leith with new fury, his yellow clenched teeth bared, and a murderous fire in the bloodshot eyes. But Leith, although he felt himself weakening, fought with growing confidence. Now he drew the other on, forcing him to cover much ground, side-stepping terrific blows, until at last Leith knew his opponent had reached the limit of his strength.

Instantly, he forced the fighting, his hard fist finding its mark time and again. Blood spurted from the black-bearded face, and Leith sprang in, swinging savage blows with deadly accuracy.

They fought in silence, now, thin jets of vapor spurting from dilated nostrils, chests heaving convulsively, their mouths gulping air.

Once, twice, and thrice, Leith placed stunning blows on Windigo Joe's face. The man roared with rage, and for a moment fought with the old savagery. But it was only a momentary flash, which died down to labored slugging.

Leith waited his chance, conserving his strength, until he saw the chance he wanted. It came when the big man, evidently thinking Leith was beaten, rushed at him with open arms, seeking to grapple and overbear him to the ground.

Leith waited until he was almost upon him, then, with every ounce of his strength,

he struck. He lifted to his toes as his arm went out, and the full weight of his muscular body was behind the blow that caught Windigo Joe on the point of the chin. The man reeled, the big body went suddenly limp, and he fell senseless to the snow.

Dazed and exhausted, Leith staggered to the sledge and threw himself on the load. The girl hurried to him, but not before she had removed the ugly looking knife from the Keewatin leader's belt.

"It was splendid!" she cried in admiration. "He won't give us any more trouble now."

The cold air quickly restored Leith, and he looked up, grinning.

"Never thought I could do it," he admitted. "But this is one dispatch Windigo Joe did *not* get."

VI

THE fallen terror of the fur country sat up in time to see the girl lead the dogs out of the woods onto the ice of the river. Then, without glancing back, he put on his snowshoes and shambled into the depths of the forest.

An hour later Suggi, the lead dog, lifted his gray muzzle and barked. His team mates joined, and then, as the girl stopped to listen, they heard answering barks from the north.

"The factory! The factory at last!" she cried, leading the way with quick strides. The dogs plunged at her heels, barking, straining in their eagerness to reach the post. Finally, upon rounding a bend in the river, the little group of buildings bearing the official title of Caribou Factory, headquarters of the great central fur district, came into sight, squatting like misshapen toads on a huge white blanket.

Never had the sight of human habitation seemed so sweet to Leith. Long fingers of thin blue smoke lifted straight in the frosty air, and now, aroused by the barking of the sledge dogs, men appeared about the buildings, all eyes fixed on the river.

When they came to a beaten trail leading toward the factory, Marise dropped behind the sledge, and the gray backs of the dogs suddenly lengthened as they broke into a loping gait. They lifted quickly over the rise of land at the shore and sped across the clearing toward the big storehouse, where Ian Laird, the factor, waited gravely, watching their coming.

The people of the factory crowded about them, and when the story of the fight with Windigo Joe had been told, Leith had all the honors of a hero thrust upon him.

It was with a peculiar sense of relief that he gravely handed the thin canvas package containing the dispatch to the factor.

"And now," Ian Laird said, tucking the package into his pocket, "come ye both and have warm food and rest."

He led the way to his big log house, where Mrs. Laird, a white-haired woman with rosy cheeks and twinkling blue eyes, welcomed them.

"Ye'd better take some sleep," she suggested when Marise and Leith finished the tempting meal she had quickly prepared. "'Tis Christmas Eve, ye ken, and to-night we dance in the old guard room, and ye'll be wanting to look on, I'm thinking."

Night had come, and the room, with its great cylindrical stove, was bathed in the yellow glow of a big lamp when Ian Laird came in again. His cheeks were glowing, and he chuckled to himself as he threw aside the great fur coat and took off his moccasins. Sight of Leith seemed to add to his merriment, and in a moment the chuckle became a roar of good-natured laughter.

"'Tis a rare, rare jest, lad, but not one ye'll likely appreciate just now," he gasped, tears streaming down his cheeks, "for it—" His words were drowned in another outburst of laughter.

In a moment he controlled himself, wiped away the tears of merriment, and pulled a paper bearing the coat of arms of the company from his pocket.

"This is the dispatch ye brought, Allan, me lad," he said, chuckling again to himself. "Ye came a long way, and endured many hardships; ye fought Windigo Joe for it. Now read!" He held out the paper.

Leith, puzzled at the factor's amusement, which obviously concerned him, stepped forward and took the dispatch. He read only a moment before his eyes went wide with amazement, and he bent closer, as if to make sure that he was not deceived.

Then he glanced up at the factor, speechless, incredulous.

"You mean—"

"'Tis just as ye read, lad," Ian Laird assured him. "It's the release from service ye've been wanting so long. Now ye can go back to dear old Edinburgh."

Allan Leith was still too bewildered to reply. He had dreamed of the day when he would be free to return to his home, far across the sea; he had almost despaired of it. Now it had come, and fate had played him the strange trick of making him carry his own release three hundred miles through the white wilderness, for the ironbound law of the company required that all dispatches go to headquarters first. It was a "rare jest," as the factor had said, and he smiled at the grim humor of it.

Struggling to bring order out of the chaos of emotions that surged through him, Leith slowly turned to Marise, and found her watching him with suspiciously bright eyes. He was free to go, now, yet strangely the knowledge brought no sense of elation; none of the happiness he had always imagined he would feel.

"You'll be happy to go home, and I'm happy you can," she said quietly.

Leith moved a little nearer, looking into her eyes until she averted them. Then he understood why the thought of leaving the Northland brought no happiness.

He turned with quick decision to the factor, who was warming himself by the stove and quietly watching the twain.

"And does this release mean I must go?" he asked the gray-haired old Scotchman.

Ian Laird gazed at him in surprise.

"But, lad, I thought it had been your wish for these three years past to go home. Have ye changed your mind?"

Young Leith nodded, coloring in spite of himself.

"I've come to like the North better," he explained, "and if you can make use of me, I'd like to remain in service."

"If you're sure it's your wish, I can arrange it, Allan," Laird replied, his voice breaking into a chuckle.

"It is, sir," Leith told him earnestly.

A mischievous glint came into the factor's kindly eyes.

"You're like many others, Allan, lad," he said. "At first ye hate the great fur country, but the time comes when ye find its spell has gripped the heart. There is much here to make ye happy."

He moved away, and busied himself setting chairs by the table for supper.

Hardly had they finished the meal when they heard the squeaking of fiddles from the guard room, a great log building which in days long past had served as a storehouse for the post's arms.

"We must hurry," the factor warned Mrs. Laird, "for we must lead the first dance, ye ken." He got up and put on his coat, again urging his wife to make haste. "Ye two will come along soon, will ye?" he asked, turning to Leith and the girl.

Leith nodded, and Marise smiled as Mrs. Laird bustled out the door after the factor. They sat in silence for several minutes, avoiding each other's eyes. Leith gazed at a red spot on the side of the purring stove.

"I suppose you think I'm queer to want to stay after complaining so much about the North," he finally said, without shifting his gaze.

"No, not queer," she answered quietly. "I have a feeling that if suddenly I knew I could leave this wild country, I might find I wanted to stay."

Leith glanced quickly toward her, but she had risen, and was putting on her outdoor coat.

"Come, we'd better go over to the guard room and watch them dance. They'll be expecting us."

Leith arose and followed her.

The night was intensely cold and still, and the buildings of the post stood black against the snow, now dull silver in the pale light of the waning moon. The northern lights bathed the heavens in color.

The voice of a sledge dog, baying at the moon, stopped abruptly when Leith and the girl came from the factor's house, and the malemute slunk away into the shadows of the near-by trees.

"Listen! Listen!" Marise exclaimed when they had gone halfway across the clearing.

She clutched his sleeve, and he felt her hand quivering while they waited. It came again—a thunderous voice, booming, booming, booming out of the hush of the purple distance.

"The voice of the rapids," she murmured dreamily. "Old Winisik's waters, singing."

She stood listening with face uplifted, and the moonlight touched her hair and loosed the magic in her eyes. Suddenly, Allan Leith held her breathless in his arms.

"And what do you hear in the rapids to-night?" she whispered, close to his ear.

"A tinkling sound like little silver bells."

He looked down, but she hid her face on his shoulder.

"Wedding bells!" he added confidently.

The Rival of Madame

A WISE OLD FRENCHWOMAN TEACHES AN AGGRIEVED YOUNG
WIFE HOW TO FIGHT FOR THE LOVE OF
HER ERRANT HUSBAND

By Reita Lambert

IT was raining on the day when I made Mme. Perrin's acquaintance. No one incident in life, I have learned, may be plucked clean from a crowded memory, any more than a raisin from a rich cake. Therefore, when I recall Mme. Perrin, I also recall how steadily it had been raining all that day, and what difficulty her chauffeur had in locating the Rue Falguière and my *pavillon*.

It is no simple matter to find my *pavillon* even on a fair day. The Rue Falguière is tucked away in the maze of dim and crooked streets that lies behind the Gare Montparnasse. There is nothing here to lure the tourist or sightseer—no tempting small shops with brightly baited windows; no famous cafés where one may watch Bohemia over its wine.

The Rue Falguière has escaped the avid eye of Herr Baedeker and the prodigious adjectives of the tourist guide. It is a street so narrow that when the shopkeeper's wares are properly arrayed on the sidewalk, the purchaser must stand in the gutter to drive his bargain; so full of years that, if one listens in the proper mood, he may still hear the shuffling feet of Villon's merry band or the whisper of brocaded skirts.

My *pavillon* itself is a modest house standing in its own small garden, encompassed by an iron fence with spikes upon the top and a bell upon the gate. Once it may have neighbored other buildings worthy of its own aloof dignity, but now apartment houses tower above it on all sides, and devour the sunshine that *le bon Dieu* intended to nurture my roses. The odors from the bakery across the street pollute the air, and the ceaseless traffic makes of my walls so many drums; but all this is the very breath and pulse beat of

Paris, and as necessary to my existence as the functioning of my own unworthy organs. Though I have, ostensibly, retired from public life, it does not follow that I need also retire to a pasture and chew the cud of my memories like a superannuated donkey.

Donkey I may not be, but garrulous—that is another matter. All women who are meddlesome are also garrulous. It was to the former quality that I owed the visit of Mme. Perrin. Perrin, by the way, is not her real name, but it will answer as well as another.

As I said, it was one of those gusty wet days that France reserves for the autumn, when the tourist is safely disposed of. I was at the desk in my *salon*, and there was a rosy fire in my grate, when Yvonne came in and handed me a card. Yvonne is my maid of all work, but she has also been my colleague in more than one affair requiring tact and loyalty. Yvonne possesses these admirable qualities, and a respectable *moustache* besides.

"What's this?" I said, and looked at the card she laid on my desk. "I do not know the name. What would she have of me, this Mme. Perrin?"

"She is a lady—of that I am certain," replied Yvonne, and I knew as well as if I could see it that the "lady" had parted with more than her card to my greedy *bonne*. "As to what she comes here for, that she insisted on reserving for *madame*; but if *madame* were to ask my opinion, I should say that the lady is in some serious trouble."

"Most certainly the lady is not French," I said.

I knew that no Frenchwoman would have bribed to such good avail. Yvonne knows as no one else knows that what cheese is

to a hungry mouse, the word "trouble" is to her mistress.

II

I PUSHED back my chair, and Yvonne lumbered down the stairs; but for once the sly one had used her bait without warrant. The young woman who entered my little *salon* a moment later looked anything but troubled. That she was English I knew at once. I knew it by her poise and by her manner—which was more than a little condescending.

She was slender and tall, and faultlessly dressed, as Englishwomen in Paris are almost sure to be. Her brown hair lay close and smooth under a chic little hat, and the cut of her coat said excellent things for its creator. Her eyes were gray and steady and cold, and her French was perfection.

After we had exchanged greetings, I let her talk for a moment so that I could hear her voice, which was cold, also—and then I answered her in English:

"Come! You say M. Marignan sent you to me. That was generous of him."

"Oh, but it was scarcely—he did not send me to you," she caught me up. "He mentioned you, and told me of some of the things you have done." She smiled, but her smile did not warm her face, lovely as it was. "M. Marignan had many remarkable things to say of Mme. Lebrun."

"Marignan is not distinguished for his veracity, *madame*," I told her, and wondered how long it would take her to come, as you say, to the point.

Women of Mme. Perrin's type do not seek out Charlotte Anne Lebrun for the purpose of exchanging affable compliments. Yet there she sat, pretending to be as comfortable as a cat on a cushion, while I could see that her nerves were twitching like a rabbit's nose. She spoke of the charm of my small *pavillon*, and remarked that the Rue Falguière was quaint.

"But interesting," she added; "and for a woman of your profession—"

"My profession, *madame*" — I never called it that—"is now a thing of the past," I informed her. "Surely M. Marignan told you that. I have taken to port and literature in my old age."

"He told me that you had retired, in a sense, but that you still handled an occasional case." Case! As if I were an alienist or a vender of milk! "He told me," she was saying with a purr in her cold voice,

"that there was no more clever detective in all France."

"Then he is mistaken," I snapped. "I am no detective. It is a word for which I have no liking. A detective is one who detects crime, and crime, as an accomplished fact, holds no interest for me. My only interest in crime is to foresee and prevent it, if possible. If I have been able to do this on occasion, I have been grateful for the opportunity."

"Exactly," she said. "I felt so certain that you could help me—"

"Ah, that is different," I told her, mollified. "It is my only excuse for meddling in affairs that do not concern me. You need help, then?"

A tinge of color came into her smooth cheeks.

"I—it is rather a difficult thing to—the fact is, my husband has disappeared."

She said it with the same sort of peevish impatience that she might have shown if her cook had given notice.

"A growing habit with husbands these days," I remarked coolly.

"I have not seen him for several days," she informed me, and her voice grew harder. "We were to have returned to England to-morrow."

"Then you do not live in Paris?"

"No. My husband lived here for some years before we were married. Since then we have been living in London—until a few weeks ago."

"Your husband is French?"

"He is an American," she said.

"You have not been married long," I hazarded, for, while her poise was that of a court chaperon, she could not have been very long out of school.

"We have been married two years," she told me curtly.

I sighed for that vanished honeymoon before I said the appropriate thing:

"I would not be overanxious, if I were you. It is difficult for those who have once loved Paris to part from her. Doubtless your husband will reappear in time to make the Calais express to-morrow."

"He has no such intention—of that I am positive."

"Indeed!" I said, not a little surprised at this assurance.

"You see, before he left, he had refused to return to England with me. He does not care for London any more than I do for Paris."

"So!" The print was a little clearer now. "You think he has gone—"

"Because I insist upon living in London? That is doubtless one of the reasons." She spread her gloved hands impatiently. "Oh, it would be useless to try to conceal the facts from you! We—we are not too happily mated. I have realized it for a long time. We have nothing in common—never have had."

She had taken off her gloves, and was pawing them nervously. I permitted the voice of the Rue Falguière to fill my *salon* for a moment before I spoke.

"For one so young, you have remarkably clear vision," I told her, and thought how, love being blind, she could not be overburdened by that commodity. "You see, and are ready to admit, that your marriage was a mistake. Well, then, I do not see why you have come to me, or why you disturb yourself about your husband. These are large-minded days. Divorce is considered a normal sequel to marriage, is it not?"

"Perhaps," she said, and leaned forward with a sort of inner eagerness. "As to why I have come to you—I want you to find Mr. Perrin for me, of course."

"So!" I said, and thought I saw her purpose clearly. "That is why you have come—to put me on the trail of this errant fellow. *Mon Dieu*, there are many bloods in my unworthy veins, but not that of the hound!"

"I don't believe I understand you, *madame*." Her manner showed me that she spoke the truth. "You do this sort of thing, do you not? It is to a detective one goes to trace a missing person—"

"Come!" I interrupted. "You are right there, but I have already told you that I am no detective. I have never yet hunted a man down to such mean purpose." My voice was not that of a good woman over her rosary. "M. Marignan has sent you to the wrong place. He should have referred you to one of these fine gentlemen who make a specialty of divorces. For a few francs they will collect enough evidence, real or manufactured, to make your suit successful before the most scrupulous judge."

I was panting with anger, but to my surprise the chilly smile stayed on her lips.

"You are mistaken, *madame*," she purred. "I do not seek evidence for a divorce, I assure you."

I was surprised.

"What? After telling me what you have? Surely you do not seek a reconciliation with this gentleman of whom you speak so coldly?"

"In one sense it is most certainly that," she said. "I am prepared to take him back, but not to live with him as his wife."

"A divorce is less immoral."

"A divorce is out of the question," she said impatiently. "That is what I have been trying to tell you."

"What you have told me," I grumbled, "is that you have a distaste for your husband, and yet wish to find him and take him back. You cut off the head and tail of your story and expect me to supply the body; but I have an aversion for marital corpses. I must protect my illusions."

I thought she would go, then. Indeed, I hoped she would. When a woman in trouble seeks my aid, I like to have my sympathies aroused, and this elegant and self-possessed young person left me cold; but she continued to sit there, and presently she began to talk again.

She was the type that looks upon honest emotion as an indecent *exposé*. I have small patience with such people. Why should one shrink from emotion as from a relative turned Apache? Still, I was moved to pity her, for I realized what it must cost her to lay bare her story to a stranger.

It seemed, then, that she had met this young Perrin in Paris some two years before, and, on one of those impulses to which even well bred young people are subject, had married him. She knew nothing of him save that he was an artist, and poor. Of course her family had objected.

"They objected to his poverty?" I asked, and wondered how they could have, since, to judge by her appearance, she had not shared it.

"Oh, no, it was not that—not so much; but mine is a very old and conservative family. The man I married was everything they were not—a bohemian, utterly improvident."

"All artists are that," I reminded her. "Did your family object to his art?"

"On the contrary, they encouraged it," she told me.

"Ah, then they *did* accept him!"

"I had married him. What else was there for them to do?"

There were plenty of answers to that, but I let her go on. Hers was the type of

family that paints defeat in the color of victory. They had been "sporting" about the marriage, but insisted that the misguided young pair should not go on living in Paris—and in poverty. The young artist was persuaded to give up his studio and go to England, where his wife's father presented them with a house in Devonshire and another in London. At first all went well, but after a few months the young husband grew restive, and began to show a shameless lack of appreciation of his good fortune.

"Perhaps he missed his work," I suggested dryly.

But no, how could that be? Hadn't they fitted up a room for him where he might have painted undisturbed when his social duties would permit? And hadn't he—not being able to think of a better excuse—declared that it lacked atmosphere, and that luxury smothered his inspiration?

"And as my father told him," my visitor went on, "there was really no necessity for him to paint. I had money enough for us both. The truth is that he was dissatisfied. He wanted to come back to Paris."

"Which you finally did."

"It was the only thing to do. People were beginning to notice, and I couldn't bear to let them know that we were uncongenial. You can see my position. Every one had predicted that a marriage like ours could not be successful, and I would rather die than have them learn the truth." It is something for the way she said it that I believed her. "I came to Paris because I thought that if he had an opportunity of comparing his old life with his new, of being reminded of his days of poverty, he would go back feeling a little less dissatisfied."

"But it did not have the desired result—your plan?"

"On the contrary!" Her lips curled. A pretty woman should not sneer. "He reverted to type. He looked up his old friends in the *quartier*, and frequented his old haunts, though he knew how my family would disapprove."

"And you remonstrated with him," I helped her. "You quarreled."

Her chin went up.

"I do not quarrel," she told me, as if it were something to be proud of. "I believe he would have welcomed a quarrel above all things. In fact, when I told him that I had booked places for London to-mor-

row, he lost his temper and said he would not go."

"And you?"

"I left the room. I would not discuss it. I understand he left the hotel immediately after, and I have not seen him since."

For more than thirty years I have dealt in human oddities, but this was the first time I had met a woman with sufficient resolution to resist a quarrel. I studied her for as long as I dared before I said:

"You had not expected him to leave like that?"

She shook her head.

"But he can scarcely have gone far." The sneer was on her lips again. "He had no money to speak of. He is probably over here in the *quartier* somewhere. He loves dirty little cafés and studios. For any one knowing this part of Paris, it should not be difficult to find him."

"But why trouble to find him?" I was still wondering why she should wish to reclaim the ungrateful young man. "Since he did not take your jewel case—"

"I have tried to tell you that divorce is out of the question. There has never been a scandal in the history of my family, and there are still people who think of divorce as a scandal. It would kill my mother. Besides, I have my own pride. I should be a laughing stock to my friends. She was speaking almost passionately now. "I want you to find my husband, because he owes it to me at least to preserve the fiction of a happy marriage."

"You want him to play-act the part of a happy husband?"

"Yes," she admitted. "He knows my family and my pride. He was thinking of these things, I am certain, when he left. He is forcing me to meet his terms, and I am willing to do so, in a measure."

"And what are those terms?"

"Well, he wants to live in Paris. I am willing to establish a residence here if he will agree to join me at certain periods at our place in Devonshire and to spend the London season with us. Such an arrangement is not so unusual as to cause comment. My friends know that he is interested in art, and I shall manage to spend some time here, of course."

"And you would have me find him and say that you will take him back on these conditions?" I asked her. "You think that he—you think that any man worthy of the name would accept such terms?"

She was fumbling through a silk bag in search of something, and she looked up at me, her brows arched incredulously.

"Why, he has no money! He is quite dependent upon me—that is, upon my family."

"And you think his going off like this is merely an attempt to gain his own ends?"

"What other reason could there be?"

"There could be many," I told her quietly, "in Paris—most especially in Paris."

She had found what she was after—a long, slim envelope; and now she looked at me again with the thing in her hand. As our eyes met, hers showed little points of fire, and the color in her cheeks deepened until they were aflame. She said coldly:

"He has no money. Besides—"

"Besides, you do not believe that he has left you for a rival!"

She stared back at me blankly. I could see that the thought had never occurred to her. She said as much.

"I scarcely think my husband's weakness lies in that direction—at least, I never—I never thought of that." She shrugged impatiently. "It's absurd, of course."

How heartily she must despise him, I thought, to believe him incapable even of unfaithfulness! Surely no man can sink to greater ignominy in his wife's eyes. I took the envelope she held out to me, and drew forth the picture of the young man. I saw a good-natured face, with eyes widely spaced, a broad mouth which, I fancied, could smile easily, and a truly American chin—square and strong.

"And here is a book," she was saying, "that I found in his trunk. There are addresses in it. I thought they might be of some help."

"And so they should be," I said, "to the person who will undertake this case for you."

I handed the things back to her. Her surprise was ludicrous. She was not accustomed to refusal, this haughty lady.

"Do you mean that you will not?" At my nod, she half rose, and then sat down again. "But why? Here I have told you—it isn't as if I were asking the impossible. It will be a simple enough matter to find him. I've told you that he hadn't money enough to get far from Paris, even if he had wanted to go. I am willing to pay whatever you ask. You can see the trying

position this places me in. I can't go on telling this thing all over Paris!"

It was when she said this that I reached for the envelope.

"No," I said, "you cannot tell this thing all over Paris."

"Then you will do it?"

Well, I looked from her beautiful, haughty face to the things in my hand, and of a sudden my conscience was heavy with responsibility. I had not tried to tell her why I refused, and now I did not tell her why I wavered. I only knew that I must keep her from repeating her story—until I had seen that young man.

"I do not say that I shall find your husband for you. I should like first to look at the thing in solitude—which is the only way I can see it clearly. If you will leave these"—I tapped the book and envelope that I held—"with me for a day or so—mind, I do not promise—"

"Oh, but you will do it, of course!" She was all affability. "If it is a question of money—"

"That it is not," I said as civilly as I could, for it is witless to lose patience with these unfortunates who think of money as the midwife for all human crises.

III

I WAS glad when Mme. Perrin had gone at last. I make no secret of the fact that I am by nature curious. I had heard the young woman's story out of curiosity, but for once my punishment was just; for in all that sordid tale I had not found one redeeming spark of beauty. I have learned to depend upon beauty, but there was none in the tale of this misalliance between a young man who would barter his birthright for a couple of English houses and a check book, and a cold-blooded beauty who would buy a man's soul to protect her pride.

Somehow, the more I looked at it in the bright glow of my little grate, the heavier my sense of responsibility toward that young American grew. Did he deserve the contempt in which she held him? Was this disappearance of his merely a gesture to wring greater benefits from the pride of his wife's family? Or was it, perhaps, a desperate effort to reclaim that which he had lost?

If he was guilty, then he deserved nothing better than to go back and play the rôle his wife had assigned him; but if he was innocent—and I meant to learn before

many suns had set—he should be left unmolested—unmolested by Charlotte Ann Lebrun, at any rate—to work out the redemption of his own soul.

It was not my intention personally to play the hound to M. Perrin's hare. Yvonne is clever, and she knows the part of Paris that lies on the left bank of the Seine. I spoke to Yvonne, then, telling her as much as I thought good for her, and showing her a picture of my young errant. I gave her an additional hint or two, and I warned her that a closed mouth catches no flies.

I knew, of course, that the missing husband was in Paris. Knowing, also, something of Americans and artists, I think I might have laid my hands upon him in half a dozen hours. It took Yvonne longer, but no later than the second day she came to me like a dog with its bone.

"Madame, I have seen him."

"To be sure. And where?"

"At the Lapin Agile on the Rue Serpente. He drinks beer."

"And what else should a good American drink?" I asked her.

"Cognac!" Yvonne said promptly. She has no *finesse*, this creature.

"You are certain it was he?"

"He is the photograph itself; and the name, the *garçon*—a pleasant fellow, that *garçon*—he knew the name. It is the same—Perrin." She lifted her lumpy red hands to heaven. "He is *très beau*, this American—tall as a cypress, and as lean."

Though she has a mustache, Yvonne also has her weaknesses.

"You have learned where he lives, then?"

"As to that, *madame*, it is true that I followed him. I waited until he had finished his beer; and when he left the *café*, Yvonne was with him, though he did not know it."

"And where did he go?"

"*Madame*, from the *café* he went down to the *quai*, where he stopped once or twice to look at books, but did not buy."

"He is poor," I said. "And from the *quai*?"

"Toward the bridge of St. Michel and the flower stalls."

"Where he *did* buy—roses, perhaps!" I said.

"Pardon, *madame*—he bought violets; and with these he turned and walked up to the Place St. André—*madame* knows it,

and how twisted the streets are there. All the time he walked faster and faster—"

"And you lost him, no? *Parbleu!*"

"But his legs were those of a gazelle, *madame*, and the streets are no wider than a man's arm, and wriggle like a bad conscience. It was in a small square off the Place St. André that he vanished as surely as if *le bon Dieu* had suddenly called him to judgment."

Well, I cursed her a little, since she expected it; and then I went for my hat and coat. Have I said that I was curious? And here was my penniless sinner buying violets and making off with them at the pace of a gazelle—but not toward his wife.

"Come," I said. "You will show me where you lost him."

As I followed her, my interest in M. Perrin grew like a good weed. He was no ordinary scoundrel—I was sure of that. He knew his Paris, as I guessed when we left the wider and cleaner streets behind and struck off into the old *quartier*. Here the clatter of wooden wheels on the cobblestones, and the shrill of the venders crying their wares, do not make you think of Notre Dame at evensong.

This ancient section of Paris is almost purely Parisian. Here are few Americans, for the American, I have learned, has a liking for clean linen and running water—things he is not likely to find in such a place. The American who seeks this part of Paris does so for one of two reasons—he is either very poor or very romantic.

When Yvonne stopped, we were in a small square that could look in as many directions as there were dirty little streets cut into its four sides. For a moment I did not recognize the place. Then I remembered it suddenly, and asked Yvonne:

"It is here you lost him?" She nodded gloomily. "Then you may go home. We shall have *pot-au-feu* for dinner."

IV

WHEN Yvonne had gone, I turned on the very spot where I was standing and went into Fleurette's *café*. Since I had found Fleurette's, I was certain that I had found the missing one.

Fleurette is equally popular with the very poor and the very romantic. Her *café* does not face the street, but lies at the end of a dim court, and behind the kitchen, as all good *cafés* should. I have known Fleurette herself since a time when we were

both younger. She has catered to more famous people than she cares to remember, for not all of them are renowned for their good works.

There was the smell of onions, when I went in, but there was no Perrin, as I could see at a glance. In a corner of the small room, with its uneven stone floor and white-washed walls and little tables, Fleurette sat on a high stool behind her desk, like a plump toad on a mushroom. When we had renewed our friendship, I ordered a bowl of soup, and Fleurette locked her money drawer and joined me. We discussed the weather and the condition of the franc, and I remarked upon the quality of her customers, of whom a few still lingered over their *café noir*. Fleurette said she had had worse.

"These pay—when they can."

"You should cater to more Americans," I told her. "I've yet to see an American with his pockets flat."

"Then your eyes are worse than mine, my friend," Fleurette said grimly. "That is the only kind of American I do see, for, when they prosper, they move away and patronize a place where they will get a clean *serviette* with every meal—though God knows the food will be no better."

"I marvel that it pays to feed them," I said. "They are handsome big devils, and require much food."

"As to size, you are right when you say that it is the big ones who require much food," she agreed. "On the same principle, the little ones require less, is it not so? Well, then, if one is wise, one may balance things and ladle the soup according to size."

"So the big ones get more in their bowls than the little ones?"

"Which is just," Fleurette said placidly. "I have in mind two of my customers. One is big and handsome, as you say, while the other is no larger than a small loaf. It has always been my opinion that our good Lord made men's insides to match their bodies."

"Ah, and the big one that you speak of—he is an American, no?"

Fleurette nodded.

"You know him?" she asked.

"Was he not here but a short time since?" I evaded, for my friend is more noted for her *potage* than for her discretion, and so I mentioned no name. "A handsome fellow, tall and fair, and wearing English clothes—"

"And with a heart almost as gentle as that of my own dead son, Pierre—though Pierre was the handsomer by far."

If it had not been, you see, that Fleurette had buried as much of her only son as had come back to her from the Somme, I might have come by my knowledge with much greater difficulty. This same Pierre was no pattern of the virtues. Death had lent him perfections he never possessed in life, and time had added to his stature; but the dead serve their purpose in life, and Pierre was no exception, for it must be a worthless scamp, indeed, who leaves Fleurette's *café* hungry, even if his pockets are flat. If it happens that he is handsome enough and tall enough to remind her of her son, then he is doubly blessed, for he has found a mother.

My runaway American, I learned, was no new friend of Fleurette's. She had known him before he had left his shabby studio for a town house and a country house in England. She did not know that he had married. He had gone off to make his fortune, she told me, and had returned as poor as ever, to judge by the meager fare he ordered at the *café*.

In short, when I left Fleurette's an hour after I had gone in, I knew not only where M. Perrin's studio was located, but the amount of his rent, the name of his *concierge*, and the kind of soup that he liked best.

It was a matter of but three minutes' walk to the Rue St. Severin and the old apartment house of which Fleurette had told me. An ancient place it was, built around a paved court with a pump in the middle. I learned from the *concierge*—whose name was Mme. Jourdain—that M. Perrin's studio was at the top of the house; but she was careful not to tell me that the halls were unlighted, and the stairs so steep and narrow that a ladder would have answered as well.

When I reached the top landing, my heart was pounding, and I stood for a moment to catch my breath before I knocked. After that I stood for another moment before the door was opened. As I waited outside, I thought I heard what might be the click of a woman's high-heeled mules on bare boards, and then the American opened to me.

I stood with my hand on my heart, pretending breathlessness, while I looked at him, and, after that, beyond him. He was

the picture I had to the life. Big he was, and handsome, though too lean. He had a friendly smile on his mouth and in his eyes, which were as candid as they were blue.

He held the door wide, so that he could see my face better in the dark of the hall. I looked into the room behind him, and saw that it was bare, save for a stick or two of furniture and an easel in the corner; but there were some bright hangings at the windows, and the violets Yvonne had seen him buy were in a bottle on the table—and there was a girl.

She did have mules upon her feet, and, if my eyes were not so untrustworthy, I should say that save for these her feet were bare. She was clutching the folds of a faded negligee with one slender hand curled on her hip, while with the other she held a cigarette. Her short hair was the color of flame, and that is what she was like—a flame. As I stood there, she strolled across to the window, humming a gay tune.

Whatever I had planned to say, you may be sure I did not say it. Instead, I asked for Mme. du Barry, which may or may not prove that I have a depraved subconscious, as the young people say these days.

"I understood this was her apartment," I murmured.

"I'm sorry it isn't," replied M. Perrin. "I don't think I know any one of that name."

I looked past him to the girl, and was not so sure.

"Pardon, *monsieur*. I was certain this was the place. Pardon!"

"Perhaps, if you try across the court, or ask Mme. Jourdain, there may be some one. I've not been here long enough to know all the tenants."

I apologized again, and thanked him. He smiled and reassured me, and left his door open, so that I could better pick my way down the stairs. As I went, I carried a picture of that bare, bright room, and of the friendly young artist and the girl standing by the window.

Though I am not a pious woman, I go to mass when it is obligatory, and I abide by the most urgent of the holy laws. Even so, when I left that house on the Rue St. Severin, I had fully resolved to have nothing more to do with this affair. I had promised the young Englishwoman nothing, and now that I had seen her husband, I was convinced that he was not the weakling she had painted him. I was convinced,

also—though I could not tell why—that he had left his wife for no worse purpose than to try to reclaim the soul he had bartered for an easy living.

My conscience reminded me of the girl in the high-heeled mules, and I told myself that it was indeed a sordid business. Still, was it less culpable in the young Englishwoman to buy back her man than for him to buy the girl with the flame-colored hair? And if he *had* bought her, he had done so with love—which, in affairs of the heart, is a better currency than gold.

Thus I argued back and forth with myself all through dinner, and my conscience was like bile upon my *pot-au-feu*. It was the same with my dessert, and I was ready with an ill-tempered harangue for Yvonne when she came lumbering up the stairs from her kitchen; but she gave me no opportunity to speak.

"Madame, he is here!"

"Who is here?" I wanted to know.

"The young American—he of the long legs, *madame*."

I was still carrying my *serviette* like an idiot when I went into the *salon*. There he was, six good feet of him. He bowed low from the waist.

"I was eager to know if *madame* found her Mme. du Barry," he said.

"Perhaps," I said, thinking of the girl in the mules. "You know better about that than I."

"But that is not her name, I assure you."

Quick and clever, that, no?

"Sit down, *monsieur*. I am curious to know how you found me."

"It was not difficult," he said. "You were lavish with your clues. You asked Mme. Jourdain for me. When you found me, you asked me for Mme. du Barry." He smiled grimly. "Moreover, Fleurette is a very good friend of mine. When I dine with her, she tells me all the events of her day."

"*Monsieur*," I said, tucking my *serviette* into my pocket, "you would make an excellent detective. If you ever find that painting does not pay—"

"Thanks!" he snorted. "But don't let's beat about the bush. You trailed me at the instigation of my wife—I know that. Well, then, I want you to know that you've had your trouble for nothing. I—"

"Tut, tut, my friend! I trailed you at the instigation of my curiosity—nothing

more. But sit down, pray, and Yvonne shall bring us some coffee."

V

It was a week after her first visit to me that the young Englishwoman came back. A chill autumn afternoon it was, when the falling leaves sing a sad song in the Bois and the flower stalls on the boulevards are golden with chrysanthemums. Mme. Perrin's cheeks were pink from the crisp air, and the scent of autumn was in her furs and cloak. She was cordial enough, but I could see impatience in her manner and smile.

"I have been hoping to hear from you," she said, taking the chair I offered her.

"You will remember," I reminded her, "that I promised nothing; and I had nothing to communicate—nothing, that is, that you would be glad to hear."

"Then you have no news? You have not found my—husband?"

"As to finding him," I said in the most casual manner I could assume, "it happens that I have met M. Perrin—"

"Oh, then you *have* found him!" she broke in sharply. "Why didn't you get in touch with me, then? Did you give him my message? Why hasn't he returned? People are beginning to notice. I—"

"Not so fast, *madame!* As to giving your husband your message, that was scarcely necessary, as I realized when I saw M. Perrin."

She looked puzzled at that, and then alarmed.

"You mean he has refused to return?"

"I believe your husband's exact words were that he was no longer on the market."

She made a brave show of scorn, but I saw that it was not real.

"What does he want?" she demanded.

"Nothing that you can give him, *madame*," I told her.

"But he has no money," she said, almost to herself. "How can he live? He must be frightfully poor!"

"No poorer than when you married him, *madame*."

She bit her lip at that. I could see that she was astonished, and angry, too.

"Well, in that case," she said at last, getting out of her chair, "I needn't stop any longer."

"No," I agreed. "I fear your stopping here indefinitely would not bring your husband back to you, on any terms."

"Then, if you will tell me what I owe you for your trouble—"

She opened her purse and stared at me haughtily.

"You owe me nothing," I told her. "As for my trouble, I took it on my own account. When I met a woman who would buy a man's soul with pounds and pence, I was curious to see the man who would sell. It was pay enough to find him making an effort to redeem his self-respect."

She took a step toward the door, and then she turned and looked at me. Her face was white with fury, and the sneer on her lovely mouth disfigured it like a scar.

"I am delighted that you were rewarded," she said. "You are a strange detective!" She had not stopped to tell me that, I knew quite well. I am not the only woman who is curious. I knew that curiosity was devouring all other emotions within her, as she proved. "Perhaps you were right, after all, in assuming that I had a rival."

"As to that," I told her calmly, "I was not wrong. It is quite true that you have a rival."

It seemed ages that she stood there staring back at me, while every vestige of color went out of her face. Then she turned and started again for the door; but at the third step I saw her sway a little, and I was at her side.

"Ah! You are human, then! You could faint, could you? Don't fight me, my dear. Sit down here, and you shall have a sip of my port."

I got it for her, talking all the time. For the moment she was limp and off guard, and any sculptor knows that he must work his clay before it hardens.

"Drink it," I told her, and, as she drank: "Now that you have shown me that you can be human, let me see if you can be honest. Come, is it your pride alone that I have hurt, or your heart as well?"

"I—I was startled—for a moment," she said weakly. "It was absurd. I must go."

"No," I said, "not yet. *Parbleu!* When there is nothing at stake, we can afford to be honest."

"I would rather not discuss it," she replied, and it was pitiful to see her try to pull herself together.

"No, you would consider that bad taste," I snapped; "and yet you did discuss it with me—remember? Where were your scruples then? I suppose you didn't

think it bad taste when you led me to believe that your husband was a weakling and a fortune hunter."

"I told you nothing that was not true," she said, and she was breathing hard.

"You are right there," I admitted. "You told me that he had sold himself and his self-respect for an easy living. You told me, though not in so many words, that he was a creature without a spine, without principle, without manhood; but you did not tell me that *you* had made him all these things. I guessed that, though, even before I saw him."

I had lashed her to defiance now.

"That is not true!" she hissed.

"It is God's own truth. Come, I cannot suppose that you were so dense as to marry this fellow as I have just described him to you. He could not have been all those things when you married him, because you loved him then—I have learned that. You loved him enough to share his poverty—his shabby studio, and his weak soup—for a time. You loved him for all the things of which you afterward robbed him of—his enthusiasms and ambitions, his talent, his valor in poverty. Oh, you loved him then—am I right?"

She made a feeble effort to get out of her chair, but my hand was on her arm.

"You are not going yet," I told her. "You need not speak, for you have already answered my question, my child. Once on a time you loved this poor, paint-smearing young artist. After you had him safely in bondage, why did you try to make him over into something you had always scorned—a worthless fop and a dandy?"

"I—I—you have no right to say these things! You are wrong—"

"I am right!" I shouted at her. "You were no sooner married than you and your family began to rob him of all the things he cherished—his art, his independence, his self-respect, his happy improvidence. Don't you know that poverty is art's natural mother?"

She said, though her lips were stiff and as white as her white face:

"He—he accepted all the things we could give him gladly enough. He seemed happy enough—at first."

"He was in love—at first," I mocked her. "A man in love is like a mole in a bright room. He did not realize what was happening to him—at first. His one thought was to make you happy, and so

he let you put a frock coat on him and a fat wallet in his pocket. When you had done that to him, you began to despise him—as he deserved."

"It was not my fault! I—"

"You despised him because he had let you change him into something despicable. He was putty in your hands, instead of the gallant young man who had swept you off your feet. Your opinion of him was so low that you did not believe him capable of winning so much as a smile from another woman. That is a common enough mistake, my dear; but there is no woman alive who has not had her rival."

The blood flooded her face at that, but I gave her no chance to speak.

"That never occurred to you, did it? And yet it is true. She was the one thing you were not able to take away from him. It is true that he forsook her for you once, but she has lain in his heart all this time, and now he has forsaken you for her!"

Ah, I had broken her at last! I heard her moan, and saw her drop her face into her hands. I spoke more gently now:

"It is too bad you were not wiser, my dear. You might have been spared all this; but you are like the person who chooses her friend's Christmas gifts because she likes them herself. You gave him all the things you preferred, and took away those for which he was starving. Do you wonder that he returned to his first love? She understands him and his needs. She will help him—she is helping him—to regain his lost self-respect. She will try to make up to him for what he has lost in you—for he loved you, too; but he will never come back to you now. If ever you need him, you will have to go to him."

"Go—to him—*now!*" she whispered, and showed me her shocked and sorrowing young face. "You—you can say that?"

"It is true that she is jealous, this rival of yours," I said quietly. "It is true that you can never reign alone in your husband's heart; but it is only in his heart and in his soul that she exists."

"What—what are you saying?" I read the words on her quivering lips rather than heard them. "Of what—of whom are you talking?"

"I am talking about your husband's muse, my dear."

She took it in with a quick, sharp breath.

"His *muse!* You mean his art? All this time, while you have been talking of

my rival, that is what you meant? There is no other woman?"

"Woman, no," I confessed; "but if she were the most fascinating and voluptuous creature of flesh and blood, she could not be a more dangerous rival. It is proof enough that she finally took him away from you."

"But you tried to make me think that he had—"

"I tried to make you *see* and *feel* the importance of your husband's art. Women reared as you have been only believe in the things they can see and feel. Because you couldn't *see* the thing for which your husband longed, you did not respect it; but art is a mistress whose charms never fade. He has braved poverty once more for her, and all your pounds and pence cannot buy him back again."

I stopped here, and made a feint of poking the coals in my grate. I saw Mme. Perrin making futile little dabs at her nose and cheeks with a bit of fluff.

"He is living once more," I said casually, as if it didn't matter, "as he lived when you first loved him. It is true that he is very poor, and possibly lonely. Naturally, no imbecile has ever said that a man's work can take the place of human companionship. His muse will not darn his socks for him, or see to it that he eats like a Christian instead of a gorilla. I have

been meaning to go to your husband's studio and offer my services in a domestic capacity. It is a poor enough place, that studio, and can stand a woman's touch—which it has not had—and a rug or two." I poked thriftlessly at my glowing coals. "But he is so proud that he will accept nothing save what he earns—and, if I am any judge of art, he will earn many things before long. The neighborhood is none too fine, either—the Rue St. Severin is the name of the street—No. 10 is the number."

I had talked her all the way to the door, poor thing. Whether she had heard me or not, I could not tell. Also, she had given me no time to explain about the girl with the flame-colored hair; but that was not important. I had learned that the flame lady's professional services are available to all gentlemen of the brush who are willing to pay the usual rates demanded by all good models.

All this happened some time ago. It was this check from Mme. Perrin, who now shares the bare studio on the Rue St. Severin with her husband, that recalled the story to my mind. The check is a generous one. I have been wondering what to do with it, and it has occurred to me that I could do nothing better than to place it at the disposal of those of Fleurette's customers who do not attain to the stature of her departed Pierre.

ON THE ROAD TO MONTREAL

On the road to Montreal
Where romance fared, long ago,
With the fragrant winds that blow
Leaves among the maples tall
On the road to Montreal.

Hear the ghosts of bugles call
Serried hosts with fire and sword—
Grand *seigneur* and English lord—
While the cannon's smoky pall
Drifts the road to Montreal—

And the redman's footsteps fall,
Moccasined, and soft as sleep,
Where the vernal shadows creep
From the forest's whisp'ring wall
O'er the road to Montreal.

Old *château* and ruined hall—
And the habitant's brave lore,
Told at night when north winds roar—
Brimming wine—and dregs of gall
On the road to Montreal.

Olin Lyman

A White Carrot

THIS NOVICE GARDENER WIELDS A WICKED SPRINKLING CAN,
WITH MOTHER NATURE AND LADY LUCK RESPONDING

By Calvin Ball

I ALWAYS been at the pants maker trade in New York, and in such a line you don't hear much about this farmer business which goes on in the country districts. It's a big business. I took a Albany trip once, and saw oats through the car window, this giving me a edge on some people in the city who only seen such things in pictures.

The only personal news I ever heard on farming was from the cutter on Number Three Bench, who he once moved out and tried wheat, but didn't lose any time moving in again and getting back at pants. It's seven years since, and he is still trying to get up even with his bank account.

What you do in this farmer process is dig up the ground, and here and there plant a seed. You stir it up once in awhile, and when it rains something comes up, maybe a weed. If you don't get a good crop you lose cash money, which is the way the cutter on Number Three Bench claims it mostly pans out.

Cutters around here mention farm goods only when they talk about how much they are now robbing you for potatoes. The talk runs on inseams and flares, the social system and what's the cuff length; and while we got a good idea the farmer element is riding us, except the cutter on Number Three Bench, we can't do anything about it, and so might as well forget this element and not kick.

I took a look across the shop to where Number Three cutter was humping himself over a pair of size seven scissors, his eyebrow wrinkled up in a worried way, like he was still thinking about seven years ago and wheat.

Things in the shop had slacked down, the foreman having ducked out for a bite at a one-arm lunch, and while I had the

opportunity, I eased over to the cutter on Number Three.

"Max," I says—his name being Maxaleski, but cut down for a practical purpose—"Max, could you give me a little of the inside on this farmer game of raising up from seeds, as I heard you know the ropes?"

Max turned around in a slow way, giving me a puzzled look.

"Why you want such information?" he asked finally.

"I need a few facts," I says. "You heard about I have moved out to a rural section and am now a commute man, using the railroad back and from business like many other thousands."

"I didn't hear about this," he says. "What you do such a trick for?"

"Well, the facts is, Max, I didn't figure to mention it around the shop, but I have gone into matrimony with a certain young woman, and as it is now spring, we have took a suburbs house on lease for all this summer."

Max kind of blinked at me.

"So this is the way it is?" he says. "I am sorry to hear it."

"Well, I don't think I am sorry about it, Max," I says; "as this matrimony game is all right, and am getting along a week or two already without trouble."

"I don't object about matrimony," Max says quick; "but when you move into a suburbs district you have made a mistake."

"Well, I wouldn't call it a mistake, Max," I says, "as there is more room out there than the tenement we moved from, the suburbs houses being made individual of wood and standing five feet apart, with plenty space at back for a garden."

"That's what I thought," Max says. "You already got a garden in your head,

and it proves you have got troubles for the future."

"That is what I want to know about, Max. Would you advise me to start a garden? Sadie insists she has got to have one, and would then save money on vegetables instead of buying at the market, Sadie being the one which landed me."

"Has Sadie had experience about vegetable gardens?"

"She never saw one," I says, "except maybe from a car window, she being a Harlemitte like myself, and born in New York City."

Max gave me a square look in the eye.

"Benjamin," he says, "if you want to save money, you keep her out of any garden, as I am one who has had experience. Gardens are a cash loss game, where the more work you put into it the less money you have, and in the end you buy all your vegetables from the market the same as with no garden. When you are raising up from seeds, Benjamin, you have got more trouble than you ever saw in the pants business, and the only people who think this farmer business is a easy graft is maybe the cutters around here who have never left the city farther than Hoboken. And I am the one who knows, Benjamin."

II

THAT line of conversation certainly made me think. I am not the kind of individual who cannot profit from the experience of somebody else, and it didn't take me more than twenty minutes of such discussion with the cutter on Number Three Bench before I had my mind made up to keep clear of any deal with seeds.

On the other hand, Sadie was much stuck on the project, and I could see that if I changed her ideas, I would have to do it in a firm way. It's a good plan, as Max says, to start off this matrimony game by being boss of your own family, and it would be a good time to prove who was who by coming down with a flat objection to Sadie about starting a garden.

When I got home at night I found Sadie on the back porch, looking over the fence into the yard of the neighbor house, where the next door man was scraping around in the dirt with a long-handled digger. This next door cuckoo was the one who put the garden notion in Sadie's head, on account Sadie is the kind who always has got to do what she sees somebody else doing first.

For the past three nights this bird was shoveling dirt until moonlight, and in extra minutes pushed seeds into the ground with his thumb.

"Sadie," I says, "I have come to a settlement in my own mind about the garden project, and we are not going to raise up a garden."

These words had a ring like something final, as I always figure it is a good plan to do all things at a clean sweep. This works with Sadie sometimes, but in this case some of the stubbornness she learned in Harlem came to the surface, and before I could get the ideas untangled, she had turned things into a discussion.

"We are going to raise a garden," she says finally, "because the man next door is doing the same, and so will we."

When you are only married three weeks, it does not pay to start a skirmish about something unless if it is necessary; but, on the other hand, if a man does not assert he is the head of a family, then a wife soon will.

I looked at Sadie in the eye.

"Sadie," I says, "as I have talked over farming business with the cutter on Number Three Bench, I know it is always a cash loss; and, as we can't afford a cash loss in the beginning of our marriage life, we better forget about raising up vegetables. Won't we, Sadie?"

"It will be a cash profit," she says quick, "because if we raise them we don't have to buy them."

"It is not a good plan, Sadie," I says. "Now I want you to take sound advice and don't start a rattlehead idea like this."

Sadie stood up more straight.

"If other people do it, why can't we?"

I've heard about what you call a one track mind, but hers goes in circles. When she gets a idea in her head it always sticks there. I am one which can use diplomacy, though, and I have heard about how you catch a fly with sugar.

"Now, Sadie," I says, using a friendly tone, "we don't want to come to any misunderstanding about the question, so we will settle it at the start by a compromise. Instead of a twenty feet back yard farm, I will get you a three feet window box like you had in Harlem. That will be plenty farm for you. Isn't this right, Sadie?"

"I want to raise up vegetables," she returns at me, determined.

"Now, see here," I finally flares up in

a firm manner. "Is this a pants maker household or a farmer? The reason you can't farm a back yard is you don't know how."

"You don't need to know."

"Don't, eh? How about Harlem when you planted a window box of seeds for poppies? What did you get? You got wheat, Sadie. You got grass. Also oats. You got weeds—but did you get a poppy? Now you keep away from this cuckoo next door, and don't let him talk to you over the fence, because he has spread enough bad ideas already, and this thing has gone far enough."

"I don't think it has."

I laid my hand down flat on the nearest piece of furniture handy, and I says:

"We are not going to raise a garden, Sadie, and the subject is now closed."

This statement was the one which opened my eyes about how misrepresented matrimony is, because I didn't understand before marriage that a wife of so small a size can start a hubbub so loud that it looked like the suburb's roof might come off. The argument certainly was a hot one, and all married men know how it is when a wife begins slamming things. Sadie talked like a streak, and in between times hollered so I couldn't answer; and in the end, having only three weeks' experience of marriage life, I got weak and give up.

"Sadie," I says finally, "you win it. Stop this hollering, and you could raise up vegetables."

III

LIKE I thought it would be, the first night I got home after the subject was settled, Sadie met me at the front door.

"Benjamin," she says, "we got to have a shovel."

"We do, eh? This is what I expected, Sadie."

"You could buy it at the Acme Supply Store, one block down," she told me quick, "because that's where they sell the farm implements."

"How do you know this, Sadie?"

"The man next door told me."

"Sadie," I says, "you keep away from this man next door. How much will this shovel cost?"

"Mebbe three dollars."

"Did the one next door tell you?"

"I asked him, Benjamin, as it was important."

"I thought so," I says. "All right, then, I will buy this shovel."

I have not got a mean disposition, and am always ready to treat a wife in a generous manner. I could tell she had her head set on owning a shovel. The Acme store certainly kept a full line of farming implements, and the man from which I inquired about a shovel was ready to treat me handsome.

"Pick a spade from the stock," he says. "And if you don't want to pay now, it is all right. I know you're a new one that has leased here recent, and we want your business bad."

I lived in Harlem many years, but I never heard anybody there make a suggestion to me that he knows I am all right and he will go me on trust. I saw it was a custom of a rural section, though, so I says: "All right, I will settle up later."

"You could pay for everything at the end of the season," he adds on.

"Pay for which everything?"

"For all other implements and so forth you will be buying as you go along."

"You think maybe I'll buy some more implements?"

"Well," he says, throwing out his hands, "they all do."

I didn't lose any time hooking an elbow over the shovel and getting out of that place. When I got back, Sadie was out on the sidewalk waiting for me, and I could see by her face that it was not good news.

"I forgot to tell you about we need something else," she states, reaching out for the shovel like it was a present.

I gave her a hard stare.

"Did you forget about it," I says, "or maybe have you been talking with somebody since I left, and I could mention who."

"We need a hoe," she told me fast. "It is more important as a shovel."

When you get into a farmer deal like the kind I was into, then any man knows he is in a fix where he can expect plenty of trouble.

"Sadie," I says at last, "I am not going to argue with you about this hoe. I am going to buy it. How much will it cost I don't know, but always remember, Sadie, you are the one who is responsible for this farmer idea, and never throw it up to me."

When I got back to the Acme store he showed me the digging instrument of a long handle, and says it's a hoe; and as it

was the same as the implement used by the man next door, I didn't have to think hard to see where Sadie got the idea.

IV

At the pants shop the next day I wedges in a few minutes talking with the cutter on Number Three Bench, him being one that I could depend on, as he knew what he was talking about.

"Sadie has already commenced it," I says to him. "And what can I do?"

"You buy any tools yet?" he asks.

"Two of them," I says. "Total about four or five dollars."

"Ha!"

"You think two is enough?"

"It ain't a start," he says. "With raising from seeds, it keeps you busy buying one thing after another thing, and it will be a bad surprise to you when you find out how much you will be out of hand at the end of the season."

"How much, about?"

"Maybe a hundred dollars."

I went back at my bench, but nobody could keep his mind on a needle when you got domestic troubles in a home. In the pants maker line you don't see a hundred growing on every bush; and when I figured, also, other marriage expenses of late, with rent of the suburbs house, and commute tickets by the bookful, it looked like I was another one which was sliding into a pickle.

When I got through work I met the cutter of Number Three Bench going out.

"Could you advise me about seeds?" I says to him. "Which kind is your advice to get?"

"Get birdseeds," he tells me, "as that's good enough, and you're not throwing away too much money."

"Do you think would they do?"

"They'll do," he says, "and you could get them at the five and ten cent store."

"But ain't birdseeds mixed up bad?" I questions. "How will we know what is coming up?"

"You'll know what's coming up all right, as no matter what kind of seeds you plant, they always come up the same—weeds. I had experience. Besides, birdseeds is variety, and that's what you need."

"All right," I says. "I'll get four packs at the five and ten."

When I got off the trolley a block from the suburbs house, I could already see Sadie in the back yard. She also spotted

me, and by the time I arrives she was around to the front steps, waiting.

"We have got to have another implement," she calls out at me; "Benjamin."

I stops on the walk and looks at her.

"Don't say we, Sadie. It is you which is doing this, and not we. What you got to have?"

"We got to have a rake with tines in it."

"Have you been talking again with this cuckoo next door?"

"I haven't said much."

"Don't tell me, Sadie, because when I got off the trolley I saw you standing by the back fence, looking over. What will this cost?"

"Two dollars," she says. "And we also must have a sprinkler."

I looked at her in the eye.

"Sadie," I says, "what is a sprinkler?"

"A sprinkler is what you sprinkle water with, and has a long tin snout with small holes punched at the end."

"Wouldn't a sponge do it, and I could bring it up from the shop?"

"I don't think it would do," she says, "but maybe we could try."

V

If anybody has got a idea that the farming business of the suburbs is a smooth life, they have made a mistake. I advise all couples of new marriage to stay away from a rural section, because matrimony affairs is rocky enough in Harlem; but when you have got a twenty-five foot rural acreage to squabble about, the kind of life you lead is like a cat and dog.

By the end of one week this suburbs household was whirling around like a spin top they sell on corners, with seeds in the soup, a rake in your chair, and nobody knows where is he at.

Sadie also put in a hurry up call for her sister, and her name is Rose, to come out and help; and with Rose also came a aunt and a cousin from the Bronx, all of which have been born in New York, and don't know any more about farming than you could learn at a Harlem night school.

Every time I looked out the back window I could see dirt flying both ways, with everybody digging, and the birds sitting on the fence watching where they put the seeds. A one foot square of ground between the walk in front didn't even miss their eye, and Rose dug it up quick to plant a turnip. As there is only room for one

vegetable, Sadie dug the turnip up and planted a potato.

A dog dug that up and planted a bone. I caught him at it, and planted a swift kick, but the longer this farmer business went on the thinner I got. The cutter on Number Three Bench finally noticed I wasn't acting natural.

"Benjamin," he says to me, "you got a run down look these days, and I have a good guess what is the matter."

"You don't have to guess," I says, "because when anybody leaves Harlem and goes to the suburbs with a new wife, which she never saw a back yard, you then know what kind of a farmer load he must have on his back."

"I know this game, Benjamin."

"I know it, too," I says. "It's a game where you try to see who could dig the most, you or the dogs. I will say I have got enough of it."

"Do the seeds come up, Benjamin?"

I handed him a frosty stare.

"They are coming up," I says, "from every spot you could look at, even the cracks in the sidewalk."

"Could you recognize what comes up?"

"You could recognize anything you want to find if you hunt for it," I says. "If what farming needs is variety, then these birdseeds certainly are a cuckoo."

When I got home at night the house was a riot, and Sadie flies at me with the news that they now got chickens in the second yard back, which they are already wandering up the alley and peeking over the fence.

"Sadie," I says to her, dropping down limp in a chair, "is this a farm we are running, or do we run a amusement park for dogs and chickens? I am getting pretty tired about it, Sadie, and I see you couldn't use a sponge which I got it for you, but had to buy a new sprinkler like I thought you would."

"The way the man next door is keeping out the chickens," she interrupts, "is by putting up a high wire screen on top the fence, which you could buy it at the Acme Supply Store, and it wouldn't cost much."

"If you saw this cuckoo next door jump at the moon, Sadie, you would also jump," I says. "Go ahead, then, and buy a wire screen for the top of the fence, as we are already in this deal so deep you would have to reach up to touch bottom; but when you see the proprietor of the Acme store go to

Europe first class, you will then know how he got there."

By the time we got this screen up I found out Rose has planted baked beans out of a tin can, and as I have got my limits, I insisted she has got to go home to Harlem.

VI

It was about this time that I got my eye on a row of nine carrots which Sadie planted from seeds which she got from the next door man. Sadie had a bad habit of pulling up these carrots and looking to see how they are getting along, and then poking them back; but the last one in the line I wouldn't let her touch. The way it grew up was a big surprise.

The reason I interfered about this last carrot was because it was not yellow like the rest, but was white. I could tell it was white on account I brushed away the dirt from the top of it, and when I saw it must be a freak, I covered it up again and gave it special attention.

I asked the cutter on Number Three Bench about it, but he said he never heard of such a thing as a white carrot, and didn't believe this could be. The kind you get on the market, he says, is always yellow; but, on the other hand, he tells me, it might be a phenomenal, such as a white elephant which comes only once in generations.

When I got home I looked up carrot in the dictionary which Sadie got for a matrimony present, but never opened. It said a carrot was of yellow color, and didn't mention white. I figured that the cutter on Number Three Bench was right, and that we had maybe caught a freak.

After talking it over, I built a wire fence of small size around it, and gave it extra sprinks morning and night from the sprinkler can Sadie had bought, which by this time the snout of the sprinkler was getting wore pretty bad, they making them weak so you got to buy a new one every season.

The summer flew along, and while I was figuring up how much cash was lost on wire screens and new implements that Sadie has been buying right and left, Sadie got home one night, excited. On the corner, two blocks over, she told me, was a suburbite of wealthy means, who he has got a hobby about farming, and has posted up a notice that he will give prizes of high value for the best vegetables raised in this neighborhood seven blocks square. We being in the section, Sadie figured maybe it was a

chance, after all, for us to show up a good profit.

"What kind of vegetables have we got, Sadie, to win a prize on?" I asked her, sarcastic. "I found out to-day that them highest ones in the corner which you been talking so hard about is weeds, and also you could look them potato vines over with a microscope and you wouldn't find a potato on them."

"It's an off year on potatoes," she comes back at me quick, "and other people's vines are on the same boat. Maybe we have got only one vegetable which is a success, Benjamin, but that one certainly is a cuckoo, and white."

I got a quick head on me to see the possibility of things when anybody mentions it like this, and if there was a good size prize for carrots, I could see we might be the ones to run away with it.

"You are right, Sadie," I says finally. "You watch the carrot close, and look out that nobody gets it away. Maybe we will yet surprise some of these suburbites who have been lifting up a eyebrow at us."

"To-morrow is the day to send it over," Sadie says, "and as it is near the end of the season, this carrot must by this time be of full size. Others along this street have already dug up their vegetables, and it's time we do the same."

"Most of them on this street don't have to dig up their vegetables," I says, "as the chickens already have. You get ready to-morrow to take the carrot to the contest."

VII

WHEN I got home the next night Sadie was already gone to the contest. I run into the back yard to find out if she had took the carrot with her, and I see she had.

From the size of the hole, it must have been a whopper for big size. I never have got much faith about winning prizes this way; but when you get a freak of white color, I figured maybe it was a act of Providence to cover up our cash loss.

As I had already got my check down at the pants maker shop, I hustled over to the Acme store to settle up the bill for the season, the summer lease of the suburbs house being near a end. When the bird at the counter figured it out for me on paper, it certainly took my breath.

"Twenty-four dollars and fifty cents," he says, "is the total for all implements of the summer. Now, you could take this pa-

per to the man in the little wire cage at the back end of the store and settle up with him, as he is the owner."

The paper had a list in detail of all objects we had bought. This twenty-four fifty was no snide, because we had bought these things, all right, and no mistake.

"Sadie," I says to her when I gets home, "I am one who is pretty mad, and you will be the same when I tell you why!"

She opened up her eyes.

"What could you be mad about, Benjamin?" she asked.

"Because we have been stung, Sadie. How I know it is? I have been down to the Acme Supply Store to pay up the season bill for implements of twenty-four dollars and fifty cents, and when I paid this bill to the owner in a wire cage at the back of the store, who do you think he is?"

"Who?"

"Sadie," I says, "he is the cuckoo next door which has been setting a example of what you better buy!"

For a minute we stood there looking, but not speaking.

"It is not a farm we been running," I says finally; "it is a swindle!"

"Benjamin," Sadie says, when she could at last speak, "we are not yet beat in this farmer deal. I have got other news for a offset against the twenty-four fifty."

"What kind of news?" I asked.

"We have won first prize!" she answers.

"For a white carrot?" I gasped.

"That is right," she says; "only it is not a carrot, but it is something which they called it a parsnip, and the seed must have got in by mistake."

For a second my tongue couldn't wiggle.

"How much," I asked, "is the prize?"

"As he is wealthy, this prize certainly is a good one. Twenty-five dollars!"

The way I stared at Sadie was a corker.

"And here, Benjamin," she adds on, "is twenty-four fifty to cover up that bill."

I put my fingers around the money.

"Well, Sadie," I says, "figuring twenty-four fifty off for implements, we are still fifty cents on the profit side, which is more than the cutter on Number Three Bench made on wheat; and we will get back to Harlem, where you could do your future farming in a window box of three feet size. We will put this profit of fifty cents in the bank. Where is it?"

"I have spent it," she says, "for a new sprinkler snout."

The Tourist's Shirt

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE WAY OF A CROOK WITH A DUPE. THE SCENE IS CALIFORNIA, BUT THE PLOT FITS FLORIDA, TOO

By William H. Hamby

ALVERSON'S office was on the ground floor between the Brant Hotel and the Moreland Cafeteria. In the windows were pictures of a few bungalows, but most of the display room was occupied by maps of subdivisions with Spanish names—and California scenery. Alverson was known, in his own advertising, as the "Subdivision Specialist."

Monday morning, a little before twelve, he was sitting at his desk in the rear of the office, talking with a small, dandified man who had a cowlick over his forehead, a rosebud in his coat lapel, and a roll of blue prints on his knees. It was apparent the smaller man was a visitor and not a customer, for he was talking fluently. If he had been a customer, Alverson would have been talking fluently.

"No, Hallet," the subdivider interrupted, "Monte Vista is dead. Why the hell should I build out there? Haven't sold but one lot in three months; can't even get tourists to take a free ride any more."

"Sh-h!" Hallet touched the subdivider's knee warningly. "There's the fellow I was telling you about."

Alverson twisted his pie-fed bulk in the swivel chair, and looked toward the big front window. Outside stood a tall, seedy-looking man, looking through the window at the gorgeous map of "Marvelous Monte Vista, the Subdivision Supreme, the Home Site De Luxe, the Land of Your Dreams, the End of the Rainbow."

"Hell!" Alverson made the same ugly noise in his throat that he did when a customer canceled a contract. "That bird hasn't enough money to buy himself a piece of pie."

"But he has, I tell you," insisted Hallet. "I thought that at first, myself. But I was

at Tiajuana with him last night. Green? Why grass is purple beside him! He didn't know what dice were. I explained to him how to shoot craps, and finally he ventured a dollar. When he lost it, he was the most surprised person you ever saw. Looked just like a hungry hound pup when you snatch a pan of milk from in front of him. He stood and swallowed his Adam's apple a minute, then risked another dollar. Lost that. Then kept on digging until he'd lost a hundred dollars. Believe me or not, even then, when he turned away, I got a glimpse of more bills sticking from his pocket."

"Don't see any from where I sit," Alverson commented, morosely.

"Well, I had a hunch right on the spot," Hallet continued. "That bird, I says, has fell heir to something—or somebody give him money to leave home. I chummed around with him. Funny sort of a cuss—paid for everything we had. I told him if he was interested in city property to be sure to look you up; that you were the squarest white man in the world. You know, Jim, I'm always turning everything I can your way."

"Thanks," dryly. "Better go out and bring him in."

Hallet, strutting a little at his achievement, brought the seedy stranger back to the subdivider's desk.

"Mr. Alverson, I want you to meet my friend Marlin, from North Carolina."

Alverson looked up, nodded, and held out a large hand. He never arose unless the man was expensively dressed or the woman very pretty.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Martin."

"Marlin," Hallet corrected. "Ray Marlin."

"Have a chair." Alverson nodded to

the one the architect had recently been warming. "Stranger here?"

"I was until I met Mr. Hallet." The light blue eyes smiled timidly.

Alverson rested an elbow on the desk, a chin in his hand, and looked contemplatively at the Carolinian. It was a wonder how so innocent and unsophisticated a human being ever got so far from home without something running over him. He wore a gray suit that had apparently never been pressed—it was doubtful if he knew a suit could be pressed.

But one thing gave the shrewd Alverson a bit of hope. That suit had once cost money. Of course it might have been bought second hand—one never could tell. But if this fellow had had a hundred dollars to lose on a dice game, there might be more where that came from.

"How do you like our city, Mr. Morlan?"

"Marlin," corrected the architect, who leaned on the desk, his roll of blue prints in his hand.

The visitor cleared his throat, his voice a bit husky:

"The pie is good—but the coffee seems—a trifle weak."

Alverson's gormand face reflected a fellow dislike. He, too, had trouble finding the right coffee.

"Where do you eat?"

Marlin nodded to the north. "The cafeteria next door."

"Try Ban's Place on Mackerel Street," the subdivider suggested. Then, with a wave of a large emphatic hand, he dismissed with reluctance the vital subject of food, and touched on first causes.

"But, aside from minor defects, the fact remains that Silver Bay is the fastest growing, most prosperous, most beautiful city on the Pacific coast. There are only two or three spots in the world that can approach it in climate—and they scarcely approach within hailing distance."

Hallet rustled the blue prints, and glanced uneasily toward the door. It had begun to rain. The visitor turned his head and looked out at the watery street.

"I forgot my umbrella at the hotel," he said, apologetically.

Alverson cleared his throat.

"Of course," he said, "you see us at a slight disadvantage to-day. Usually, from May to December, the sky is clear every day. This is really the first rain I have

ever seen in October. But it is worth a million dollars to the back country. All natives rejoice. Merely a trifle inconvenient to tourists. But only think what the weather is back home!"

The visitor nodded reflectively. It might have been a wave of homesickness on his unsophisticated face; or perhaps it was merely a natural half melancholy soberness in his mood.

"I guess I better go." He arose apologetically. "The cafeteria is crowded, so you have to stand in line if you don't get there in time."

"Everything is crowded," Alverson said. "The town is chuck full of visitors already. Never saw the tourists coming so early. They are coming to stay, too. They drop in here by droves, asking for houses and lots. Most of them want lots—view lots—lots that are in distinctive subdivisions."

The visitor took a reluctant step as if hating to tear himself away, yet hearkening to the call of pie.

"My friend, Mr. Hallet, here," he smiled at the architect, a warm, friendly smile, "says you have a lot of good buys that a fellow could make money on. I got a little money—my aunt left it to me when she died—" A shadow crossed his face. "She weighed two hundred pounds, and died of apoplexy."

"Yes, indeed." Alverson felt the thrill of a great call. "I have bargains that will double and treble and quadruple—"

Again Mr. Marlin took an apologetic step toward the door, and said in an almost husky whisper:

"I want to have a talk with you some day."

The subdivider and the architect stood looking at each other as the pie hunter from North Carolina went out the door. Then the architect took off his hat, and ran a nicely manicured hand over the cowlick above his forehead, and winked the right eye.

"I want his shirt," Hallet announced.

Alverson laughed with the glee of a man who has just found something good in a barren spot.

"All right, Pete, you can have his shirt. What I want is the coin his aunt used to have."

II

THE Moreland Cafeteria, as usual at half past twelve, was crowded to the guard-rails.

Perdita James, a little late and a little hurried, threaded her way among the tables, holding her tray high enough not to bump heads, looking for a place to alight. There was not an empty table.

But at one, a man had finished, and was reading a newspaper. The china rustlers had even removed the dishes from in front of him, but he missed the hint that his room was needed, and continued leisurely to read. The paper was laid flat on the table, and he turned a page at a time with his left hand.

Perdita set her tray on a corner adjacent to the paper, and began to unload it. The young man did not look up. He was about the only man in the cafeteria that had not looked up as Perdita passed.

One of the labor saving attendants took her tray, and she sat down to the assembled luncheon. Still the young man did not look up. He had light hair, irregularly brushed; a smooth high forehead, and a well shaped nose. The cheek bones were a bit too distinct, the skin a trifle pale, but healthy looking. The mouth and chin, though, were the attractive features. They looked sort of friendly and wistful.

Apparently, the young man found something interesting. He smoothed the page out flat on the table, took out a pocket-knife, opened the small blade, and bent over to cut out a paragraph.

"Don't!" The exclamation was an involuntary, housewifely outbreak from Perdita. "You'll cut the tablecloth!"

"No," the young man soberly shook his head, "I have the napkin under it."

Perdita laughed. Sometimes the humor of the way a china cup was dropped more than compensated to her for its loss to the world.

He made a neat cut of the clipping, and put it in his vest pocket. She expected he would say something more; and rather wished he would.

She felt a little guilty at her warning. The tablecloth was none of her business, and Perdita had a complex against meddling females. Besides, this chap looked seedy, and no doubt was cutting out an address from the "Help Wanted" column for its possibilities.

"A cafeteria is a handy place to eat when one is in a hurry." She took the initiative.

"I like it." His voice was shy and huskily modulated. "You can get two pieces

of pie here without a waiter dropping dead."

She laughed again. He smiled this time, and looked up at her. But his eyes shifted quickly, and a faint tinge covered the cheek bones. He seemed afraid to look again.

Perdita knew why, and felt complimented. Her sort of beauty was an annoyance in the business world, where she earned her living, but no woman ever wishes she did not have it.

The young man arose, and gave her one sidewise glance as he started precipitately for the cashier's stand near the exit.

Perdita pushed her plate to one side, and reached for her dessert. A smile tucked under each corner of her mouth. The shy young chap had left his paper.

She felt a bit sorry for him because he was obviously so unused to the world. Getting a job was hard for that sort. The aggressive ones would crowd him out of line at every waiting list. She wondered what kind of a job he was going to ask for.

A happy thought occurred to her. She retrieved the paper he had left, and took it back with her to the Whortle Lumber Company, where she worked.

In the office she picked up a fresh copy of the noon edition of the paper, and turned to the page from which the young man had knifed the clipping. Perdita gave a quick, indrawn breath of surprise. The clipping was not at all what she expected. It read:

Princess Matovia tells you everything—past, present, and future. Tells your name, your innermost secrets, and advises you on business, health, and love. Telephone for an appointment, Main 0914, or call at 3982 Taylor Street.

Perdita's very soft, naturally pink lips pursed as if to whistle.

"Poor chap," she thought, "he's lonesome, and scared about something. That is when they go to fortune tellers—unless it is a lark. And he looks a perfect stranger to larks."

She took up the paper from which the clipping had been cut. On the margin of one page were idly scribbled some figures and a few scattered words. One was a name—Ray Marlin—and the names of two or three towns. One looked like Asheville, another was Raleigh.

Perdita folded up both papers, put one on Whortle's desk, and laid the clipped copy beside her typewriter. She was smiling in a moment. Her moods came and went swiftly.

She knew Princess Matovia—knew her quite well. She had had the princess tell her fortune two or three times. It was really quite good fun.

But that was not the way she knew her best. The princess had bought lumber from Whortle's to build her home—the house designed to afford that necessary background for a successful seer of people's past, future, and present amours.

The princess had had some trouble paying her bills, and it twice had been Perdita's intervention that had prevented the lumber company from curtailing the fortune teller's future by a foreclosure. By the way, the name signed to the note for the lumber was not Princess Matovia, but Jane Jones.

Perdita's smile grew more animated as her thoughts leaped from one idea to another. She broke into a low, running laugh, and reached for the telephone.

"Main 0914. This you, princess? Perdita James speaking. Oh, no, dear; we're not going to push you—I merely want to ask a favor."

Then, after a few moments of cryptic conversation, Perdita nodded approvingly.

"Thanks, princess, ever so much. I'll try not to spoil your reputation."

Twenty minutes later, as the rest of the office force had just begun to straggle back from lunch, Perdita swiftly and accurately pounded out letters from her notebook. A hand touched her hair, and she turned her head sharply.

It was Hallet, the dandified little architect, slipping a rosebud into her hair. He always approached so catfootedly, he was within striking distance before you knew it.

"Hello, Beauty!" His small, thick-lidded eyes smiled at her siruply. His soft hat was pushed back to reveal the dark cowlick of hair over his forehead.

"Oh, hello, Hallet," Perdita responded with a neutral sort of friendliness. The architect was a good customer of the lumber yard, and she was loyal to her employer, even if it took roses in the hair to get orders.

Uninvited, he drew up a chair and sat down close beside her desk—so close that his elbow touched hers.

"I'm feeling good to-day, Beauty," he said. "Just landed one of the biggest jobs of the season. Going to build ten houses all at once for an Eastern tenderfoot—Southern, rather—he says 'suah'!" He lifted his heavy lids, and winked as one

wise guy to another. "Cost plus. It'll mean a big lumber bill. How much do you suppose the old man will allow me off on this?"

"To contractors," she said, "we allow a five per cent discount. But a cost plus job is not a contract."

"Oh, yes, it is—more so. I got to have ten per cent on this. I want the stuff billed at the regular price, and then—I get the rebate after the owner settles the bills."

Perdita frowned. This sort of thing was tolerated, but she didn't think it fair.

"Well, you better see Newton about that. He attends to all special contracts." And she resumed her typing.

Hallet arose, a little bit miffed. She had not shown the right appreciation of his good luck.

"Say, Sweet One," he lowered his tone, "I'm going to drive up to Los Angeles, Saturday. Isn't there somebody you'd like to visit up there?"

"No, I've got to wash my hair, Sunday, and mend my stockings," she replied, clicking the keys.

At three o'clock the telephone on her desk gave a loud, prolonged ring.

"Whortle Lumber Company," she spoke into the receiver. "Oh!" Her tone instantly lowered.

"That you, princess? Friday evening at eight o'clock? Splendid. Thank you very much, dear."

III

NEXT morning Alverson had Ray Marlin out at Monte Vista, cornered at the intersection of the only two streets that were graded and curbed. The subdivider never allowed grass to grow between him and a prospect.

"Look at the view!" He gave a long, sweeping wave of the right arm that seemed to spread the view all the way to the mountains to the east.

The lank young man looked briefly at the view displayed, then turned and looked back at the town. It appeared quite a long way off. Alverson caught the look, and clapped a hearty left hand on Marlin's shoulder.

"Young man, one of the greatest blessings of the automobile is that it annihilates distance. And everybody has them. Twenty years ago you would have thought this subdivision a trifle far out. To-day, it is practically in the heart of the city.

Only twelve minutes from here to the Plaza. Nearly all exclusive subdivisions in the great cities are away from the down town. Take all the country club districts—never closer than ten or fifteen miles from the business section. Why, in Los Angeles, they sell subdivisions that in the pioneer days would have taken a day's journey to reach."

"They say," the young man remarked solemnly, "they can sell rain barrels for cisterns up there."

Alverson laughed. "That's a good one—rain barrels for cisterns! I must remember that. They certainly are a bunch of go-getters up there. This subdivision so close in at Los Angeles would sell for five thousand dollars a lot."

"How much will it sell for here?" the Carolinian asked.

"I have two hundred lots here that I have planned to sell at an average of twenty-five hundred a lot. They are worth more—much more. But I want to get development started out here. I'm going to offer you the choicest lots in the tract—these ten right here—for twenty thousand dollars."

A shocked expression crossed the lean, solemn face. "Twenty thousand dollars!" he repeated, huskily. "Man, that's a pile of money."

"You can resell inside six months at a profit of ten or fifteen thousand. In fact, if you buy, I want you to give me the exclusive listing of these at thirty-five hundred apiece. I'll move them for you before January."

"Suppose," the innocent one suggested, "you just keep them, and sell them for thirty-five hundred and split the profits."

Alverson laughed. This hick was certainly droll.

"I don't think," Marlin added, "I better put all my money into lots. I was thinking I might buy one—"

Alverson was not disappointed—not badly. He had merely thrown out that twenty-thousand-dollar proposition as a feeler. There had been nothing to indicate how much money, if any, the fellow really had.

"Don't buy one lot," he said, shaking his head. "Buy a bunch of lots. You can control them that way, and multiply your profits ten times. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll sell you this block of ten lots for one-fourth down, and you can pay the rest by the month."

The young man walked about, and looked at the lots with an uneasy, distressed air.

"I'd like to buy them," he admitted wistfully, "it's good stuff, but—"

"See here." Alverson began to get down to real mental labor. He was concentrating on high. "Pay me three hundred a lot—three thousand on the ten—and I'll carry the balance."

The young man still hesitated. He hated to be disobliging, but something held him back.

Alverson labored an hour—an hour and a half. Once the stranger took the pen and started to sign, but again backed off.

"You see," he said, a little shaken, "this money my aunt left me is all I got to invest. If I lose it—" A look of pained inefficiency crossed his face. He knew how utterly incompetent he was to earn money himself.

"I'd like," he confessed, bashfully, "to make enough out of this to sort of keep me—and maybe get married on."

Once more Alverson renewed the attack. At last the young fellow revealed what was holding him back.

"I like your lots," he admitted; "it's a right pretty view—and I can't see why the town won't come out this way; but Mr. Hallet advises me to build houses instead of buying lots. He says all the money nearly is made in building and selling houses. He's got plans that he says will sell a house anywhere. And he is willing to build the houses for me, and charge me only five per cent, and he won't charge me a cent if I ain't satisfied."

Alverson had been scowling darkly at this double crossing by the architect. It was not the first time Hallet had done him an underhanded trick. And then he always came palavering around about the business he sent to the office, and Alverson overlooked the past.

"You see how it is," the young man said, with his apologetic smile. "Mr. Hallet has been an awfully good friend to me. He's one of the nicest persons I ever met."

Alverson knew when he was up against a stone wall, and he never tried to butt one down. Instead, he turned square about, and undertook to head off his prospect in some other direction.

"I'm sorry not to be able to sell you the lots," he remarked, as they walked back to where the machine was parked beside a

lone pepper tree. "But I am free to confess Hallet's advice is good. That is, if you are willing to go into the building game seriously. How much capital have you to start?"

"About thirty thousand," the young man replied, with shy pride. "My aunt left me that all in money and bonds."

The subdivider's stone wall toppled over onto him. "Thirty thousand!" he repeated, awesomely, as one who has just lost a life verdict. And only to think all of that might have been his if that damned Hallet had not double crossed him!

"Mr. Hallet," Marlin continued, "wants me to start ten houses at once. He can do it much cheaper that way. Buy everything at wholesale, and send different sets of workmen from one job to another."

"Yes, yes," Alverson nodded. "No doubt that is the best."

"You really think I can make money at the building game?" The solemn young chap's blue eyes turned appealingly to the subdivider.

Alverson cleared his throat doubtfully, but the impulse to block Hallet's game was routed precipitately by an idea—the most brilliant idea that had ever come to him in an emergency.

"Not a doubt of it, Marlin; not a doubt in the world," he said, emphatically.

The subdivider's office did not close that evening at five thirty as usual. The two girl employees left, and the outer door closed, but nine o'clock that night the light still burned brightly over Alverson's desk, and there was a litter of papers and figures before him. Also close at his elbow sat Hallet, the architect. The storm between them had passed, and they were now down to the kitchen floor of their agreement.

The subdivider repeated the terms of the armistice slowly, numbering them as he went. To each Hallet nodded a positive assent.

Alverson reached for the telephone and called the Warren Hotel. Twenty minutes later he opened the front door to admit the guileless young man from North Carolina. He locked the door after him.

"Glad I caught you, Marlin." Alverson made no apologies. He let the other fellow do that. "I'm a busy man, and this evening is the only chance I could talk over with you a proposition that will astonish you."

The young man's face warmed at the sight of his friend Hallet, and he shook hands with the architect.

Alverson dropped into his swivel chair, put a thumb in each vest hole, and leaned back facing the two others. His big head sat judicially on his heavy neck, his large face reflected shrewd benevolence, kindly honesty, generous but intelligent brotherly love, and vast patriotism for the home town.

"Marlin," he nodded, thoughtfully, "I've just gone over these plans with Hallet. They are good, and with a few minor changes which I have suggested, they will be the most salable houses in town—sell like hot cakes. I have gone over them carefully, because both me and Mr. Hallet want this venture to be a big success. You are the kind of man Silver Bay needs."

The Carolinian blushed at the compliment.

"He says he drew the plans especially for those view lots in block twelve of Monte Vista," Alverson continued. "He supposed, of course, those were the lots you were going to buy. And he agrees with me that is the very best place to build."

The young man became immediately distressed. He ran his hand over his cleanly shaven chin, and his mild blue eyes were apologetic.

"But I can't buy lots so expensive." He shook his head regretfully. "You see, Mr. Hallet says these houses will cost about thirty-five hundred apiece. That will take more money than I've got—but he says I can easily borrow enough to make up the difference."

"The point exactly." Alverson reached over and struck his large palm on Marlin's knee. "Here is the proposition that will astonish you—nothing like it has ever been offered before in this town. I am going to sell you those lots without a cent down. Let you build on them; let you get all on the first mortgage you can; and then give me a second mortgage for the price of the lot—which you can pay off when you will sell the houses."

"Give Mr. Marlin the details," Mr. Hallet suggested.

"Here is the way it works. I give you an ironclad contract for the lots—submit it to any lawyer. You build, say, a thirty-five-hundred-dollar house. The lot is to cost two thousand. That makes the actual cost fifty-five hundred. You can borrow two thousand without a bit of trouble—

maybe twenty-five hundred on a first mortgage. I give you a deed to the lot. You put on that mortgage, and then give me a second mortgage for two thousand. You can pay off that when the houses are sold. This way you will have enough and some over to build the ten houses, even if they cost four thousand apiece."

"How much do you think they will sell for?" the sober young man asked, eagerness in his pale blue eyes.

"I'd say from seven to eight thousand," Alverson replied, judiciously.

"Maybe nine," Hallet suggested.

Marlin moistened his lips. That would be a nice profit. He suggested timidly: "Suppose I sell them all. Could you—would you then let me have more that way?"

Alverson nodded with a whole-hearted liberality.

"I tell you what I'll do. I'll enter into a contract to let you have a hundred lots on the same terms. You build your houses, get all the first mortgage you can, and I take a second for the lot."

"I think that is awfully good of you," the Carolinian said, feelingly. "I hate to do it—because I feel that you ought to have something down; but I can't build if I don't."

"That's all right." Alverson waved one hand, while the other reached into the desk for the contracts he had drawn up. It was a perfectly plain, firm contract, legally drawn. Subdividers do not take chances with the law except in desperate cases.

The young man signed it, and shook hands gratefully with both men. Hallet insisted on leaving the office with him, and suggested they go to a prize fight.

When they were gone, Alverson carefully put the contract in a drawer of the desk and locked it. He felt prouder of himself than he had for years. He had not pulled anything like this in a long time.

Monte Vista was really good stuff. It had cost him a thousand dollars a lot as it stood. Once a house was built on the lot—with another man's money, of course—his price for the lot would be sure. He would clear ten thousand on that deal, and maybe start a boom at Vista—who knew? But no matter how flat broke this sucker went, there was the sum of twenty thousand good dollars coming to him on this deal, certain, sure.

"It takes brains," he mused, as he pulled

down the top of his desk, "and if a fellow hasn't brains, money isn't much use to him, anyway."

IV

PRINCESS MATOVIA's reception room was furnished in silver and green. A trim and keen-eyed maid received her patrons, and sent them in at the right moment.

The inner room into which they passed, through heavy doors that opened and closed noiselessly, was small and finished in black, with a few spots of orange. Against the wall, and facing the door, was a high-back chair covered with black brocade, in front of it a low, narrow table, across which one could easily reach.

Perdita James, dressed in the regalia of the fortune teller, entered the room from the door at the left. Over her shoulders was thrown a long, brilliantly red mantle that came almost to the floor, fastened loosely in front by a white bow. The red mantle parted slightly as she walked, showing underneath a thin, shining silk gown of almost transparent silk. On her head was a tiara of imitation pearls, and over her eyes a black mask.

She settled herself in the chair, its black back rising far above her head, and laid her hands on the mahogany table in front. The room was suffused with a soft, dim light.

Perdita's heart pounded excitedly as the heavy door from the outer room opened, and the maid ushered in a tall young man who stopped diffidently just inside the door. His light hair was in disarray above his high forehead; and as he stood fumbling the brim of his hat, held before him in both hands, his eyes curiously took in the room. They settled at last on the striking figure in the chair, and he asked, just above a whisper:

"You are the princess?"

The girl's head nodded regally. She looked more the part than Princess Matovia, herself. A languid white hand motioned him to the chair drawn close up to the table in front of her.

Marlin glanced about for some place to lay his hat, and dropped it on the footstool. He took the chair in a sort of awkward, half-frightened excitement, locked his hands before him, and swallowed as he looked at the girl in the black mask.

She spoke, the voice low and in keeping with the dim lights:

"What does Ray Marlin wish to know?"

A flicker of a smile crossed the angular face.

"How long is the pie going to last?" he inquired.

"As long as men are stupid, there will always be pie for some—and crusts for others." Perdita said it quite like an oracle, and felt the pleasant glow of returning self-confidence. From the moment of his entrance she had been in an uneasy flutter over whether she could put it over or not. Fortune telling was not such an easy trade after all.

She moved her hands softly over the top of the table, palms down, and spoke in the tone of a trance medium. "You have come on a long journey—from somewhere in the south—Ash—no, Raleigh!"

His eyes, watching her intently, lighted, and across his face flickered a warm, happy smile.

"You do remember me, princess, after all. I was afraid maybe you wouldn't."

This was a new complication. Perdita shook her head, slowly.

"The princess does not remember the living—only the dead."

The smile shifted into a grin.

"All right. Count me dead, just so you remember me." His face went serious, his mouth, really a most winsome mouth, was touched with the melancholy of sentiment.

"Princess"—his voice was tinged with emotion—"I reckon that night in Raleigh that I drifted in to have you tell my fortune, I was the lonesome galoot in North Carolina. You suah was good to me. I don't remember much of anything you told me, but I nevah forgot how you held my hand."

"And that is why you came to-night"—Perdita's voice snapped out of the trance tone—"to get your hand held again?"

Even in the dim light the blush that mounted his prominent cheeks was visible.

"No, ma'am," he replied, abashedly, "I just happened to see your advertisement, and came around hoping you'd remember me." He swallowed bashfully. "You see, since I been in Silver Bay I haven't talked with anybody, hardly. Only one woman has spoken to me—a girl at the cafeteria, who told me not to cut the tablecloth."

"Ah, I see now"—Perdita instantly took refuge in the sing-song, weary tone of the seer—"what has been obscure before. Danger for you. Beware—the girl is an adventuress."

"No, ma'am"—the young man shook his head positively—"she isn't that sort at all. She's the nicest-looking girl I ever saw, unless it was you, and I can't rightly say I ever saw you." He fixed his eyes on her mouth and chin, and the tip of her nose, all that was visible under the mask, and frowned reflectively.

"Princess, you look different from what I remember. You've been getting younger all the time. But I reckon that is just the custom of the country. A fellow's grandmother, these days, makes him feel like a bachelor uncle with the gout."

Perdita forcibly held back a smile that twitched at her lips. She had already got a swift glimpse into the lonesome young man's heart. He did not want his fortune told. He wanted company. He had come to her as the only woman in Silver Bay he had ever seen before.

"Let me see your hand." She held out her left, palm up. He put the back of his in it. Her fingers closed with a firm, even pressure. His hand was soft, and the palm was not that of a workingman, but there was strength in it.

After a few minutes of idle patter about life lines, and wealth lines, and character, she said:

"You are going to get the job you want."

He shook his head. "I don't want a job—I sort of hoped to go into business."

"Ah!" She discovered another little line. "You have an offer to go in with—a man."

"He's aiming to build ten nice houses for me."

She must have given an unconscious start, for he lifted his eyes quickly to her masked face.

"Anything wrong about that? Do you see a pile of money anywhere in my hand?"

She shook her head. "No, it is a hand that leaks money—sows it like wheat on stony ground."

"What about the love line?" He looked down at the hand she still held. "How many times have I been married, and how many more tries are left for me?"

"You have never been married." She bent over, and her head touched his—just a brush—but she felt unnecessary confusion at the contact.

"You will never be married," she continued, "unless the girl you love—proposes to you."

He looked up, grinning broadly. And there was some sort of dare in his eyes that made her doubt this prophecy.

"Are you single yourself, princess?"

"I'm married to the past," she said.

"I ain't—I'm trying to divorce it."

Perdita felt she was getting the worst of this fortune telling business—that he was encroaching over the line.

"Beware of the girl of the cafeteria," she ended. "Avoid her—for I see in her great mischief—and beware of dishonest men."

She leaned back in the chair, one hand resting on the table. He reached over and took that hand in both of his.

"I thank you, princess. You suah have been good to me again. I got a lot to remember now."

As he went out, Perdita James looked down at the hand still on the table—the hand he had held.

"I'm afraid," she said, "I have something to remember, too."

V

PERDITA was eating her salad when she became aware, without looking up, that the young man from Carolina was circling about her table with a loaded tray in his hand. He appeared not to have seen her, and seemed earnestly endeavoring to find a vacant table, but he looked the other way whenever he came near one. Finally, with a sort of desperation, he turned to her table, and hesitatingly lowered his tray.

"This place is always crowded," he said in a tone that might be taken either as conversation or merely talking aloud.

"It's the pie," she said, keeping her face straight.

He grinned in vast relief. He was the sort of man to whom a rebuff is more painful than a club. He unloaded his tray, sat down, and spread out the napkin on his knee. His manners were distinctly good.

"I'll try not to cut the tablecloth to-day," he said, soberly.

She smiled. "My lunch was seventy-five cents to-day, and it oughtn't to have been over sixty. So whack away at the linen all you want to."

His laugh was understanding.

"I went to a fortune teller last night," he announced.

Perdita busied herself by pouring coffee into her cup from the little silver pot.

"She warned me against—too much pie. So I got two pieces to-day."

Perdita changed the subject quickly.

In a moment he remarked: "You don't happen to know the best place in town to buy lumber?"

"I certainly do. Whortle's, of course." She smiled. "I work there."

His fine blue eyes quickened with surprised pleasure. "Well, ain't that lucky. I'm going to buy a right smart bill of lumber there."

"Hallet is going to build houses for you?"

"Yes. Wasn't I lucky to get him? I got a little money from my aunt. He's going to build on the 'cost plus,' he calls it, and save me a lot of money. I never saw anybody that knows the building game like he does. It makes my head ache to hear him talk two-by-fours, and sinks, and rabbets."

"Yes, he knows the game, all right." Her right eyebrow lifted slightly. "What are the houses to cost you?"

"Thirty-five hundred apiece."

"Did he put it in writing?"

"Oh, suah." He took a sheet of paper from his pocket, and held it out to her. She glanced at it briefly. It was merely penciled estimates like: House No. 1—\$3,540; House No. 3—\$3,452.

"This is only an estimate. He doesn't guarantee this," she remarked.

"Of course he does," the young man objected. "He has given me his word for it."

For a moment her eyes showed vexation at his stupid innocence.

"A verbal agreement is not worth a snap. Have it in writing."

"Oh, I wouldn't hurt his feelings by asking him to do that," he said, naïvely. "He's a friend of mine."

She gave a despairing shrug, and changed the subject. After all, it was none of her business.

On the way back to the lumber company's office, Perdita saw Hallet enter the Calvaro Café with Sam Newhall. They were smoking big cigars and talking most amicably. Newhall had the reputation among Silver Bay builders of being a thoroughly rascally carpenter contractor.

Perdita quickened her step, the heels of her shoes giving angry little clicks as they tapped the walk.

She had guessed correctly. Hallet was going to farm out these subcontracts to unscrupulous workmen, who would charge exorbitant prices, and then split with the

architect. It was an old trick, not common in Silver Bay, but entirely too frequent.

She was angry at Hallet, pretending to be a friend of a man, and then robbing him of his very shirt. She was angry, too, at Marlin for being so gullible.

But what could she do? Whortle's was tacitly in on it—allowing Hallet that discount—and she was employed at Whortle's.

The moment she reached her desk she took up the telephone, and once more called Princess Matovia.

"I've a notion," she said, "he'll want to come back. If he does, don't see him yourself, but call me again. Thanks, princess."

As she hung up the phone, she murmured: "Maybe I can warn him that way."

VI

BUT Ray Marlin did not go back soon to the fortune teller. He was too busy.

There is a fascination in seeing wheat grow that you have sowed. There is a special charm in the rose that you have planted and pruned. To watch a house go up that you are building, even if you are doing nothing but furnish the money, is more intriguing than the cleverest play on the stage.

Marlin bought an automobile, and every morning and afternoon he drove out to Monte Vista—always coming back to the cafeteria for lunch.

Hallet was certainly pushing things. Workmen swarmed over the lots like bees over mellow apples under a tree. The first part of a building—the foundation, the framework, the roof, parts that make a big showing—go up with great rapidity; and, to the uninitiated, with surprisingly small cost.

The man who never built a house before thinks when the walls are up, and the windows and doors are in, the thing is nearly done. Alas, and alack, it is only a third done! It is the finishing that breaks the heart of the owner. But Marlin did not know this—yet.

"How are the houses?" Perdita asked, one day at lunch.

"I never saw anything go up so fast," the young man replied. His blue eyes were filled with a lively interest these days, and he even cut the slurred corners of some of his drawing words. "I was lucky to get Hallet. He is a pusher."

"The cost?" She lifted her brows.

"The houses must be over half done, and they've cost only about sixteen hundred apiece so far."

Perdita had done everything she could to warn the young man, but to no avail. At last she had left him to his own devices and downfall.

"I wish—" He was bashful again, and into his face came the lonesomeness one feels for some one to enjoy things with. "I wish," he repeated, "you would go up and look at them with me."

"I'd love to." She had seen them several times without his knowledge.

"This evening?"

"Yes—before dark. Come to the office for me at five."

"I'll suah be there." His blue eyes warmed with happiness.

The sun slipped behind the Pacific Ocean, the sky turned a soft red, the lights came on in Silver Bay—myriads of lights that made the bay front look like a crescent from the Arabian Nights, and still they walked about Monte Vista.

"It is a wonderful view!" She sat down on the doorsill of one of the houses. Timidly, but eagerly, he slipped down beside her. Their shoulders touched.

"And don't you like the houses?"

"Very much," she agreed; "they are lovely."

"I'll make a pile of money on them, won't I?" His hopefulness was pathetic.

She sighed before she replied. "I hope so. It depends on how much they cost. I think they may sell."

"Mr. Hallet says I can sell them for eight thousand apiece."

"Don't ever buy Christmas presents on the word of Mr. Hallet—or any other man."

"Or woman?" He gravely turned his head sidewise.

For a moment her eyes lingered on the fantastic beauty of the lighted city before them, and the silvery bay beyond. When she did speak, it was softly.

"There is always one woman a man can trust—if he happens to know which one it is."

VII

THE houses were done. Perdita heard Hallet tell Whortle that. For a time Marlin had come for her often to drive up in the early evening to see them grow. But for the last two weeks he had not come.

She had missed him at the cafeteria. She grew uneasy about him. He must have gone. She had a fear that Hallet and Alverson had broken him, and that, seeing he was swamped with bills, he had disappeared. It was Whortle who had asked Hallet about the lumber bill—six thousand dollars of it was still unpaid.

"The houses are finished," Hallet said; "but Marlin is out of town. I think he'll pay all the bills. He has met everything so far right on the dot."

When Hallet, as usual, edged up to Perdita's desk for a word, she asked:

"How much have the houses cost?"

"Around forty-six hundred apiece," he answered. "That is not counting my five per cent commission as supervising architect, you know."

"He thought," suggested Perdita, "he was going to get them done for thirty-five hundred."

Hallet laughed lightly. "Did you ever hear of any one getting a house built for what he thought it would cost?"

An hour later the Princess Matovia called the lumber company's office on the telephone. Perdita's heart gave a leap. But, alas, it was too late to save him.

Perdita's body, under the red robe and the silvery silk sheath, shivered with a queer sort of delight as she reached across the table and took the young man's hand, and held it in both of hers.

"You are troubled." The disguised tone was that of a sympathetic fortune teller.

He nodded slowly. His face was marked with tiredness. Shadows were under his eyes.

"You have been on a journey."

Again he nodded. His hand clung to hers, but his mind seemed far away.

"Been to North Carolina," he said, slowly. "I had to raise more money. Yes, princess, I'm in trouble."

She increased the pressure on his hand. The thrill of tingling warmth spread over her. She leaned a little closer across the table.

"It's because of debts," she said; "you owe a large sum of money—six thousand dollars."

"Four thousand," he corrected. "I owe a lumber company four thousand, but I can pay that to-morrow."

The "princess" then gave him a reading—a gay, playful sort of reading that

diverted his mind. At the finish, she said solemnly:

"You are too trustful. It is your one great fault. You have too much heart."

"I reckon that's so," he smiled drolly. "I'm going to give it away—that is if she'll take it!"

VIII

PERDITA met him at the cafeteria at noon the next day. For a long time before his disappearance their lunches together had been an established custom.

"I've missed you," she said, as they reached their table.

"I've been away."

"The houses are all done?"

"Yes."

"Settled with Hallet and Alverson?"

"No—I settle to-night."

"You know, I suppose," she said, "the lumber bill at Whortle's has not been paid?"

"All paid but four thousand," he said.

"I gave Hallet a check for that at noon."

"But there was six thousand on the books," she said, wonderingly.

"Could not be," he declared. "The bill altogether was only nine thousand. And I had given him checks before for five thousand on lumber."

"Get your blank checks," she said, "and see who cashed them. I can recognize every check that was turned over to us."

Quite to her surprise, when she got back to the lumber office, she found Hallet had been in, and paid the full six thousand dollars due on the lumber. She was rather sorry for that. She had hopes that Marlin might catch him in some of his rascality.

Later in the afternoon Marlin came to the lumber office. Perdita saw him waiting around outside the rail, and knew he was watching for a chance to speak to her.

She made some memoranda on a sheet of paper, and then turned and called to him.

"Mr. Marlin, will you come in a minute and look over these figures?"

He came eagerly, and she had him draw up a chair.

"What is it you wanted to see me about?" She smiled at her subterfuge of the figures.

"Why," he blushed, "I wondered if—if you would go with me to the fortune teller's to-night. I thought it might be fun."

Her dark brown eyes looked at him with

swift compassion. He was pitifully brave. She knew that half, or maybe more than half, of all his money had been filched from him on this one crooked deal. Yet he was trying to smile—wanting to show her an amusing evening.

"I'd love to go," she said. "What time?"

"I'll be settling up with Alverson and Hallet at seven," he replied. "I expect a right painful sort of time. But I'll be through by half past eight—or nine at the latest."

"Then suppose I meet you at the princess's studio?" she suggested. "I know her. I'll be there by half past eight, and wait until you come."

"I suah appreciate all you have done—" He grew embarrassed, and broke off, and left rather hurriedly.

Perdita put in a most miserable afternoon. It was foolish to take other people's troubles to heart, but she could not help but worry over the whimsical, unsophisticated Carolinian.

It was scarcely dark when she went out to the princess's place. Matovia was in the act of eating supper. At such times she was Jane Jones; a little plump, and very good company.

"How is your guileless housebuilder?" She insisted on Perdita having a cup of tea.

The girl sighed and shrugged. "I guess they have cleaned him out. They are finishing the job this evening."

"Seem to take quite an interest in him." Jane's eyes were on a piece of buttered toast.

Perdita did not reply.

"I watched you tell his fortune last time," Jane continued, glancing up slyly. "It looked to me like a case of love at second sight."

Perdita, having been without any warning whatever, found her face burning hot.

"Oh, shucks!" she exclaimed, and tried to pass it off.

But Jane Jones laughed knowingly. "I've been in the business too long to mistake the signs. Of course, now that he is broke, I suppose you will have to support him."

Perdita shook her head.

"I can't see that man, even if broke, living off a woman. He'll either make a living, or he won't marry."

Jane shook her head, feelingly. "I wish there were a few more like that."

After the maid had cleared the table, the princess lighted a cigarette, and leaned back in the chair, puffing thoughtfully.

"I've tried hard to remember the time your young man came to me in Raleigh, but I never managed it until to-day. I know him now. Some one from Raleigh sent me a copy of a last week's paper that had something about him."

"I suppose it wouldn't interest you?" She lazily half closed her lids.

Perdita was on her feet, and had the fortune teller by the shoulder. "Get that paper quick, or I'll murder you!"

Jane laughed and looked over her shoulder. "It's on the shelf there, by the clock."

IX

ALVERSON was in the back of his office beside the desk. The large blinds in front had been pulled. He was not sure but the young Carolinian might be a little stormy when he discovered just how he was coming out.

Hallet had already arrived. The architect sat in a chair tipped back against a county map that hung on the wall, smoking a large black cigar.

"Do you suppose that bird can sell those houses?" he asked, puffing a ring of smoke.

"Sure." Alverson's pie-fed bulk creaked the swivel chair as he also reached for a cigar. "The Belton Realty people made him a cash offer to-day of five thousand apiece."

Hallet half closed his heavy lids and grinned significantly.

"Did you advise him to accept it? He won't lose over twenty thousand that way."

"No." Alverson pursed his lips. "I find it best not to give advice."

"Except for profit," Hallet remarked, winking. "By the way, have you got yours sewed up yet?"

"The mortgages went to record to-day, I think," Alverson replied. "If not, then to-morrow morning. I deposited deeds to all the lots in escrow with the title company, and had Marlin deposit at the same time a mortgage for two thousand dollars on each lot. I gave the title company instructions that he was to be allowed to get a cash mortgage for whatever he could, and they were to record it first, then record mine as a second."

"How much of a first mortgage did he

get?" Hallet hoped there was no hitch there. He wanted Marlin to have plenty to pay off that five per cent commission.

"I don't know." Alverson smiled a bit wryly. "The money lenders are awful tight. The last time I asked him he said the banks only offered two thousand on each house."

A knock sounded at the front door, and both men stiffened involuntarily. The hour had struck. The sucker was near the gaff. The settlement would be a trifle uncomfortable, maybe, but the results were sure.

Alverson let the Carolinian in, and locked the door after him.

"Well, how are you, Marlin?" he said, effusively. "Wonderful weather we are having."

"Wonderful," the young man agreed, solemnly.

"Sit down at the desk." Alverson generously waved him to the swivel chair. "I guess you and Hallet will want to check over accounts first."

Hallet had drawn a chair up to the corner of the desk, and was meticulously fingering over a sheaf of bills: lumber, carpenters, plumbers, painters, plasterers, tile men, bricklayers—an endless array it looked to the unsophisticated builder.

"Here are the receipted bills." He pushed them toward Marlin. "I've gone over them twice, and think you'll find everything O. K."

The lank young man sat quite still, not making any movement to examine the bills. He seemed in deep and troubled thought.

"Of course," Hallet spoke a trifle anxiously, "the houses cost a little more than we expected. But they always do. They are much better than we first planned. I put in a lot of extra time that doesn't usually go into a job of this kind. And a number of things I paid for out of my own pocket."

"You shouldn't have done that," Marlin said. "I do not want anybody paying for my bills."

"Oh, that's all right," Hallet waved generously. "There is nothing I would not do for a friend."

"You mean to him, don't you?"

The remark stung Hallet—made him uncomfortable. He had hoped this boob would take his medicine without gagging.

"I don't understand you, Ray." The tone was aggrieved. "I never worked harder on a job in my life, and I thought

you would be highly pleased. As I told you, I want you to be satisfied, absolutely." He glanced at a memorandum under his fingers. "My five per cent commission comes to more than twenty-three hundred. If you think the houses cost a little too much, just make the check two thousand, and I'll lose the balance."

Marlin shook his head. Hallet watched the movement uneasily. He did not know whether it was a refusal to accept the cut, or to pay the two thousand.

The lank young man took a pencil from a vest pocket, held it by the tip, and absent-mindedly tapped the edge of the desk. He swallowed two or three times, then spoke slowly.

"You promised if I wasn't satisfied you'd knock off the commission, didn't you?"

"Sure." Hallet looked annoyed, but he really expected this—rather courted it because then it would put Marlin on the defensive. "And if you feel that way, why, knock it off."

Marlin nodded affirmatively. "It's knocked off."

There was another moment of embarrassed waiting. Hallet fidgeted with the receipted bills, and Alverson creaked his chair. Alverson was sitting a little out of this. Thank Heaven, his dealings were all in the clear. Suddenly, Marlin turned to Hallet.

"How much money you got in the bank?"

"Oh, I don't know." Hallet was too surprised to assume indignation. "I usually keep a pretty good balance."

Marlin nodded again, and tapped the desk with his pencil. Hallet could have sworn. Damn it, why didn't the boob say what he had to say and get it over. He had already paid out the money. All the bills were receipted and on the desk. There was nothing for him to do but crab a little and get it off his chest.

"Just what have the houses cost?" he asked.

"There are the bills." Hallet again pushed them toward him.

The figures were \$4,689.74 apiece.

"I didn't know anything about building—you did." Marlin spoke reproachfully. "You said they would not cost over thirty-five hundred." Tap-tap went the pencil.

"Oh, hell!" Hallet's temper was getting short. Was this boob going to try the

cry-baby stuff? "I told you we made them better."

Marlin shook his head. "No—we just followed the blue prints—and dodged a few items at that."

Hallet was the silent one this time. He did not suppose Marlin had noticed two or three little economy cuts.

"I expected the houses to cost only thirty-five hundred each. I trusted you as my friend." The Carolinian was speaking with mournful regret. "Don't you think, Mr. Hallet, the fair thing would be for you to pay me back the difference?"

Hallet laughed. He could not help it. The suggestion was too ridiculous for anything but humor.

"Well, you watch me do it," he said, growing annoyed after the laugh. If the boob wanted a show-down, all right. "I've built your houses, and done a good job. I did not guarantee any set price. There are the bills. They are paid. You have decided that I must do the work for nothing. All right. If that is your idea of the way to treat a friend, go to it. I'm through." He arose aggrieved and angry. "Good night."

"Wait!" He had not gone more than two steps until that one word caught him up. He turned and looked into a face that appeared strange to him—the face of a man whose blue eyes had narrowed and darkened, whose friendly lips shut in a hard line.

"Hallet"—the tone made the architect shiver—"on the lumber bill you got a rake-off of eight hundred and seventy-three dollars. On the plumbing contract you got a rake-off of six hundred and thirty. On the plaster you gouged me for eleven hundred. All down the line you overcharged me for everything—and got your rake-off."

"Well," Hallet shrugged, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"Then, good night." Hallet again moved to go.

"Wait!" Marlin leaned back slightly and made a brief gesture with his right hand. "Sit down."

Hallet obeyed, not knowing what to make of the tone of authority.

"On October 23," Marlin began, deliberately, "I gave you a check for two thousand, which you said was for the Whortle Lumber Company. I made the check direct to you, and marked it 'For Lumber.'"

That check you cashed in San Francisco, and used five hundred dollars of it to bet on a horse race—and kept the rest."

"But I paid the bill yesterday," Hallet bristled. "It's receipted there."

Marlin closed his lips tight for a moment, and sat staring at the little architect.

"There is a special statute in this State," he spoke with cold precision, "which provides that if a builder pays money to a contractor or architect, building either on contract or cost plus, money for a specific purpose, and he uses that money for other purposes, he is guilty of a felony."

"But," Hallet spluttered, "I made it good—"

Marlin nodded. "And it is not the last thing you will make good. I have a warrant sworn out for your arrest—and an officer is waiting outside to serve it."

"Now," he pointed a long finger at the desk, "take the pen there and write me a check for eleven thousand, six hundred and eighty-three dollars and seventy-four cents—the difference between what you said these houses would cost, and what you made them cost."

"Otherwise"—the tone was regretful but final—"you go over the road."

Hallet fumed, and blustered, and begged—and wilted. This would not only wipe out all his graft on the buildings, but dig into his own reserves over three thousand dollars—and he was getting nothing for his work.

But finally he wrote the check. His hand shook, and sweat stood out on his neck as he signed his name.

"All right." Marlin folded the check and put it into his vest pocket. "I'll dismiss the warrant after I cash this in the morning. That is all for you." He swung the chair around and faced Alverson.

X

THE pie-fed subdivider was fumbling his hands over his knees. It had been a painful scene, but he did not see how the Carolinian could do anything to him. His part had been legal.

"You got your mortgages?" Alverson asked placatingly.

Marlin nodded.

"Yes, the papers went to record this morning at nine."

"How much did you get on each house—two thousand dollars?" Alverson moistened his lips.

"More."

"You were lucky—two thousand, five hundred?"

"More."

"Is that so?" Alverson was surprised. That was the limit of what he expected.

"Just how much did you get on the first mortgage?"

"Six thousand."

"Six thousand dollars!" Alverson got to his feet, his knees wobbling.

"But that is more than the houses and lots will sell for," he gasped. "Why—that is robbery! That makes my second mortgages worthless."

"Exactly," Marlin said, unperturbed.

"How long do they run?" Alverson was gulping as though swallowing his tongue.

"Ninety days."

"Ninety days!" the fat subdivider gurgled. "Why, you can't sell the houses in ninety days for six thousand."

"I know it," Marlin admitted, soberly. "I'll just let the mortgagee take them."

Alverson stood staring at the lank imbecile, his eyes bulging with indignation.

"But, good Lord, man, don't you see that would wipe my second mortgages out? I would not get a cent for my lots."

"Quite so," Marlin assented.

Then black, angry suspicion swamped the bulky subdivider. This was a trick. With a shaking hand thrust near the other's face, he demanded hoarsely:

"Who made these fool loans of six thousand?"

"An aunt of mine—one that isn't dead."

The heavy face grew livid; he stood gaping, staggered to the point of apoplexy.

"And when she forecloses those mortgages, shutting me out," he said, menacingly, "then she'll redeem the property to you—and you'll have got my lots for nothing."

Marlin smiled. "Perhaps she may—she's quite a generous old lady. Good night, gentlemen."

Then, as the door closed behind him, a recollection hit the subdivider like a mallet on the head. He collapsed into a chair, a shivering, quaking mass of human jelly.

"Good Lord!" He looked up piteously at Hallet. "He's got me tied up under contract for ninety more lots the same way." He twisted his big hands together like a hysterical woman. "What will I do? What will—"

Hallet replied viciously:

"I know what I'm going to do—I'm go-

ing to Tiajuana, where you get a quart for two dollars." He slammed his cigar to the floor. "The damn, dirty crook!"

XI

PERDITA JAMES, once more wearing the red mantle and tiara of the fortune teller, sat in the high-backed chair in the dimly lighted room of black and orange. The maid had been instructed to tell Marlin that she had not yet arrived, but that Princess Matovia wished to see him.

The news item in the Raleigh paper had been a shock to Perdita's vanity. She had been so sure of Ray Marlin's incompetence and need of a guardian. No wonder the first lines of that article had startled her:

Ray Marlin, formerly attorney general—and, by the way, the youngest man ever elected to that office in North Carolina—was in Raleigh this week, and—

At first she had been quite angry and mortified to remember what a fool she had made of herself—trying to warn and protect an attorney general! But an impersonal sense of humor at last brought a laugh at herself, instead. Nevertheless, she was going to punish him for playing the innocent so smoothly.

The door opened, and her heart gave that queer leap—which it always did at his approach.

She let him take both her hands as he sat down in front of her, and she felt a wave of jealousy as she remembered he thought these were the hands of the princess he was holding so closely.

"You have good news," she droned, professionally. "The North Carolinian has won his case."

"Not Carolinian any more, princess, but Californian, now. Ain't the climate just wonderful?"

He laughed whimsically. "And, princess," he continued, "I haven't won my case—I am in real trouble clear up to my eyebrows."

"You didn't get a settlement out of those rascals?" Perdita almost forgot she was a fortune teller.

"Oh, yes," he shrugged that away, "I got through that all right—but this other is real trouble. I'm in love—in love with the girl who told me not to cut the tablecloth—and it has got so I just can't think of anything else but that girl. Really, princess, she's the sweetest, finest girl that's

been born in the last ten or fifteen thousand years."

It was hard to punish a man who talked like that; besides, her heart was bounding so dizzily that she was afraid of her voice.

"Well?" she encouraged him to go on.

"Really, princess," he admitted with that old shyness, "I'm an awful bashful, awkward sort of cuss—and I'm afraid when I tell her about it she'll laugh at me. What do you think?"

"Ask her and see," Perdita intoned. "The heart of a woman is a strange thing. Perhaps she is fool enough to be in love also. Who knows?"

"It would be foolish for her to love a man like me," he said, humbly. "But, princess, it would be the greatest of wisdom for any man to love her. She suah would take wonderful care of a fellow, if she happened to choose him."

"Don't you let her trifle with you," Perdita said, almost sharply. "You be the attorney general with her—make her love you."

"Thanks, princess! You suah are a comfort." He squeezed her hands hard, and got up to go.

A little later, while Marlin waited in the reception room, the maid admitted Perdita at the front door.

He jumped up and took her outstretched hand.

"I'm suah glad to see you," he said, warmly. "I was half afraid you were not coming."

"I was delayed! If you don't mind, we won't have our fortunes told to-night."

"No? I've had mine already." He grinned. "Let's go automobiling now."

The motor car stopped alongside the

pepper tree on Monte Vista, in front of his houses—pretty little homes all ready for occupancy. To the west glimmered the lights of the city. Dimly the stars outlined the silver bay.

They sat looking down in silence for several minutes, their hearts beating audibly.

"How did you come out with them?" she asked.

"Oh, fairly well." He was smiling in the dark.

"That part hasn't worried me much," he added, slowly. "I was pretty suah all along."

"What part did worry you?" Perdita inquired, in a detached way.

"How I was coming out with you," he answered.

That angle was settled at once, with satisfaction to both.

The ex-Carolinian thereupon confessed that he was not exactly a boob in building operations, but a realty lawyer of some standing. Perdita expressed great surprise.

But her play acting did not equal his amazement when she revealed that it was she—and not the real princess—who had told his fortune in California. He kissed her a half dozen times, to show how dumfounded he was.

They sat in further silence, looking blissfully off at the twinkling lights. Then they both laughed, almost in the same breath.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing!" she replied. "What are you laughing about?"

"Nothing much!" He chuckled again.

They both had decided never to tell that they knew everything before—which tactfulness was very promising for their future.

THE END

DREAMS

If I could dream of you some happy night
When winds blow soft, and moonbeams glisten white,
'Twould be the fairest dream I ever knew,
If I could dream of you.

If I could dream of you, your lips might frame,
In tones of more than friendliness, my name,
Your eyes might hold love's pledge within their blue,
If I could dream of you.

If I could dream of you, dreams claim so much,
Your lifted face, the magic of your touch;
But, oh, my waking heart would break anew
If called from dreams of you.

L. Mitchell Thornton

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